

PENDOWER



A STORY OF CORNWALL IN
THE TIME OF HENRY VIII.

37979





FATHER CYPRIAN AND THE NEW TESTAMENT.

P E N D O W E R.

A Story of Cornwall

IN THE TIME OF HENRY THE EIGHTH.

By

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P E N D O W E R .

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTORY.

T was early on a lovely summer morning, in the year of our Lord 1539, when two young girls, apparently about fifteen and sixteen years of age, wandered together in the convent grounds of the Valley of Pendower.

Tall, branching elm-trees mingled their boughs overhead, and a babbling stream rippled at their feet ; whilst the rooks cawed in the trees, and the trout swam merrily in the waters.

The two girls were carelessly sauntering down a winding path by the side of the rivulet ; there was just room for them to walk abreast amidst the bowering ferns and brushwood that grew in rich luxuriance beneath the ancient trees. The morning air was laden with sweet scents from the convent garden close at hand, and spangles of sunlight found their way at times to gem the rich herbage which clothed the banks of the stream.

The elder girl threw her arm lovingly around her companion, saying,—

“What sweeter life can you dream of, my Evelyn, than we have led here together? What spot on earth can be fairer than

this ? What friends dearer than the lady mother and the gentle nuns ? ”

“ As for the life with you, dear Cecily, you well know that our sweet friendship is fair and steadfast as the lilies on the calm waters. It has been my one unfailing joy, ever since my mother placed me here, when first I left the nursery in my father’s hall ; and yet—”

“ And yet—” echoed Cecily.

“ Well, if you must know my whole mind, the thought will come to me that life is too still, pent up in this narrow valley. The very air is burdensome ; and I long to climb the hills above us, or to follow the birds in their flight. The lady mother is kind, but the sameness of her speeches wearies me ; as for the sisters, their pastimes seem of the dullest, when I bethink me of the merry sports I had when I was at home with my own little brothers ; and then I long to go where I shall never more see the face of priest or nun, always excepting the rosy face of the village priest whom I saw scattering sugar-plums for a scramble for the children. There is a breath of freshness about him, and I think he would not set me long penances were he my confessor.”

“ You speak of things I know not,” said Cecily, sighing. “ To me, the convent child, no earthly memories belong. Orphaned and alone in the world, what should I have been without the mother and sisters I have found within these walls ? And yet there have been times when I have had dreams and imaginings that have carried me beyond myself. Have you not known—have you not felt—moments of ecstasy when your spirit has almost burst its earthly bonds and has lost itself in a sea of infinite delight ? Sometimes it may be when the music on our solemn festivals is thrilling every soul as it bursts into triumphant

strains after subdued and sadder harmonies ; or yet more wistfully does the spirit reach forth from its prison-house when the last sunbeam goes down beneath the shining waters at the opening of our valley, for there we know is the mighty sea, the image of the Infinite. Ah, I love to see how the rosy clouds mantle and curl above the departed glory ! And then the hush that follows, how soothing and sweet ! Nothing to be heard but the tinkling of the sheep-bell upon the hills, and the voices of children rising from the village, until our own call comes, the vesper-bell summoning us to our evening devotion."

"Cecily," said Evelyn softly, "you always seem to me to have such beautiful and holy thoughts. I suppose it must be from always having lived in a religious house. But with me it is quite different. Somehow things will come into my head."

"What things, for instance ?" asked Cecily.

"Oh, many things. Such things as you would never think of. But they will come ; and then Father Cyprian seems to know by instinct that I have thought them, and at confession he draws them from me, and then of course follows a penance and a long lecture. I must say I think it is rather hard."

"Oh, do not say so," said Cecily. "How much worse it would be for you if Father Cyprian did not thus probe your heart and discover your secret sins, for then the sin would still be there, only without pardon, without absolution."

"Well, Cecily, the worst is, that after all that is said and done, I do not find that it makes much difference."

"Not much difference ! What can you mean ?"

"Why, that neither the confession, nor the lecture, nor the penance has made me change my mind. You look surprised, but I will give you an example of what I mean. You know Sister Martha. The sisters all say she is the greatest saint in

the convent, and that the Holy Father will surely canonize her after her death. You know she never puts on anything but the oldest clothes, I may say rags, and wears them until they all but drop to pieces. I have considerable doubts, moreover, whether any water ever comes near her skin; and it is only on the highest festivals that she joins the sisters in their recreation hour; indeed, I have heard that she has frequently passed the whole forty days of Lent without breaking silence.

“Now this holy woman creates in me a feeling of dislike and repulsion, so that whilst I repeat the office in chapel, I can scarcely bear to be near her; and once when Father Thomas was singing matins, it so happened that Father Cyprian saw me make a wry face at being near her, and the next day at confession he kept me upwards of two hours questioning and cross-questioning—wanting to know whether I had been reading any new books, what news I had heard when last I was at home, whether I had not begun to feel any desire for a vocation, and so on, until I got so wearied out, that I told him my first and greatest desire was to go home and stay there, and that I would rather be a sinner in the world than a saint in a religious house,—thinking, of course, of Sister Martha.”

“You said all this?”

“Yes; and a great deal more. I know that I told him that I loved Sister Lucy with her quirks and tricks, although she had no saintly ways about her, and that it grieved me to the heart to see her shining hair cut off when she made her profession; indeed, that I would that no one made a profession at all, except such as were old, and ugly, and dirty!”

“What did he say to this?”

“Oh, he struck his breast, and muttered a good deal that I could not understand. Something about ‘the spirit of the age,’

and that I was 'ripe for heresy,' and should 'lose my soul.' But he set me penances, which I performed. And yet I think just the same thoughts as ever."

Cecily was silent for a minute, then she said,—“My Evelyn, you know that ever since you entered these walls you have called me your mother. Bear with me if I say that it seems to me you show a spirit of irreverence in speaking thus of our superiors. And surely, had your mind been occupied with the blessed words Father Thomas was singing, you had not been disturbed in your devotion by faithless thoughts about Sister Martha.”

“You forget, Cecily, that I do not understand Latin, as you do.”

“But you might learn if you would.”

“I have no taste that way. I would rather go into the kitchen and help Sister Francesca make pastry and comfits, or work at the embroidery with Sister Lucy. Ah, Cecily, you do not yet know your child. I fear you will not love me much longer if we go on talking thus.”

“I know,” said Cecily, “that the good God has so created this wonderful world that no two flowers are exactly alike, much less two human creatures, and that my Evelyn, with some faults, has yet a noble spirit, and a soul which would never stoop to deceive, or think a mean or unworthy thought.”

“Indeed, I hope such things are far from me. I should be unmeet to be my father’s daughter were it thus with me. But now you speak of it, I would have you know that to tell the truth at all hazards, and utterly to abhor all falsehood, and even the shadow of deception, is a virtue less common within these nunnery walls than in the wicked world outside. My own father possesses no clerkly skill, and none of my brothers could

either read or write at twelve years old, but yet their spoken word was all-sufficient, and the mirror of truth ; while here, in the convent, I never know what reservations the sisters may be allowed in their minds, which change and mystify the plainest and commonest things."

Cecily was silent for a time, then she said,—“ There are many things too hard for us to understand. I would gladly know why it is that my confessor throws obstacles in the way of my entering upon my novitiate, not even allowing me to believe that I have a true vocation, whilst Father Cyprian, as it seems, is ever pressing you to renounce the world, and urging upon you the peculiar blessedness of the religious life.”

“ This certainly is a marvel. But tell me, Cecily, is it not true that you were dedicated to religion from your birth ? ”

“ Not exactly so. You know that my grandfather, Sir Richard Pendower, died from the effects of his wounds on the field of Bosworth, leaving no son, but only my mother, then an infant, to inherit the family estate. On his death-bed he willed that the bulk of his property should be left to the Church, to provide a priest to sing for his soul for ever in the chantry of this convent.

“ There was also a proviso made in his will, that, in consequence of the large addition his bequest made to the estates of this religious house, shelter and maintenance should ever be afforded to one of his kin, and that free of dowry or further gratuity. My mother, as it was supposed, would be the first thus to enjoy this provision ; but after attaining her majority, she refused the privilege, and engaged herself to my father, to whom she had given her heart whilst residing in the castle of an uncle with whose family she had been brought up.

“ My father was the youngest son of Sir Walter Tremaine, and as such had no heritage but his sword ; and my mother

being left with no worldly goods, their life after their marriage was, I believe, a constant struggle with poverty, and it was only by the kindness of relations that my mother had a home in their castles while my father went to the king's wars.

"He died, as my grandfather did, on the field of battle—in the border-wars under Lord Surrey.

"I was but a few days old when the fatal news was brought to my mother. In her weak state it was enough to turn the balance between life and death, and she was speedily reunited to my father beyond the grave.

"Thus I was left upon the hands of my father's eldest brother, in whose mansion my birth had taken place. He had already a large family of his own, and more daughters than it would be easy for him to find portions for. He therefore opened communication with the superior of this convent, and, in consequence of my grandfather's will, Mother Theresa agreed to receive me as soon as I was three years old, free of all charge, to be fed, clothed, and educated until I reached the age of eighteen years. I am then to return to the world for one year, and should I at the end of that probation feel sure that I have a vocation, I shall be allowed to enter upon my novitiate, and finally assume the veil."

Evelyn sighed ; then brightening suddenly, she said, "Many things may yet happen before it comes to that. For instance, you will visit me at Vivian Hall during the year that you are in the world, and when once my father and mother have seen you, they will never let you go away again, and we shall live as sisters at home instead of here."

"Dear Evelyn," said Cecily, "your love for me makes you think that every one will see me with your eyes. Squire Vivian would think twice in these troublous times before he cumbered

himself with the charge of a portionless maiden. Was it not because of the war made against the king's grace by his subjects in the north, that your father left you here when he followed the Duke of Norfolk to quell the insurgents three years ago? And ever since that time, have not the rumours that have come to us from the outer world spoken of nought but plots and counter-plots, heresy, and sedition? It is not so many months ago that my Lord of Exeter was taken, and your father again put off your return, not being willing to expose his treasure to the roughness of civil war. Believe me, I am best in some safe and quiet retreat, where poverty and humility will be my portion in this life, and a high estate of glory in the next."

"There again," said Evelyn, "everything is full of contradictions. You talk of poverty and humility, yet it seems to me that our lady mother is neither poor nor lowly. If so, why does she thus have trains of servants and costly robes? Why are the daintiest dishes prepared for her use? Why—"

"Evelyn, forbear. You allow your tongue too much license. Do you not know that our good mother holds a dispensation from his Holiness the Pope to take such meats as suit her frail constitution, weakened, no doubt, by long fastings and vigils in her early days? And under the costly clothing which, as the servant of the Church, she wears, does not a garment of hair-cloth chastise the flesh in secret? Should not her saintliness raise her above the slander of chattering tongues?"

"I have nothing to say against our lady mother," said Evelyn, blushing, "although it may be I do not think her so much of a saint as you do. Indeed, being near of kin to my mother, it were ill done of me if I did not love her well. Moreover, to me she has ever been indulgent and gentle, and has humoured me more than my own mother would have done.

Only, sometimes I have thought that if the king's grace were to send down his officers to see how our sisters kept their rule, there would be more of sinners than of saints found here."

"Heaven forbid that the king should disturb the peace of this holy house," said Cecily. "Father Cyprian said that when the heretic queen was put to death, there was good hope that his Grace would cast away his evil advisers and restore the unity of the Church."

"And yet," said Evelyn, "my heart was sore for the poor queen. Maybe she was not so great a heretic as men said. I have always thought the king was in overmuch haste to take another, when she was slain. If he had waited a while, it might have been found that poor Queen Anne had bitter enemies, who were doing her an ill turn. Anyway, the hand of Heaven fell heavily on the new queen who took her place, for she soon followed her mistress to the grave."

"It is when we hear of such things doing in the great world that I feel I would gladly know nothing of it, but rather pray for the poor souls who are toiling in the midst of the turmoil. But listen! Does it not seem to you that there is an unusual stir in the village this morning?"

"Yes," replied Evelyn. "And all night long I was dreaming of battles, and this morning when I woke I thought I heard the tramp of armed men going and coming."

"Our Lady send that this is no evil omen," said Cecily, crossing herself devoutly; "but the holy priest said in his sermon last Sunday that the wicked spirits were unchained, and were walking the earth at liberty. Let us go and pray. The bell will presently sound for matins; and may the good angels guard our souls."

CHAPTER II.

MOTHER THERESA.



THE convent in which the speakers in this dialogue had been educated was one of those larger communities which escaped dissolution in 1536, when the Act of Parliament which first sounded their death-knell became known through the length and breadth of England.

It was not altogether unknown to the emissaries of the king; but being situated in a remote part of Cornwall, and King Henry's visitors having their hands more than full with reporting on those monastic establishments where grosser abuses prevailed, the Convent of St. Bridget had been hitherto undisturbed by an inquisitorial visit from the commissioners appointed by the Crown.

It was known, moreover, that both the convent and a smaller establishment for monks, situated higher up the same valley, the Priory of St. Wennon, were much resorted to as places of safe and quiet retreat for the children of the surrounding gentry when the country was disturbed by civil commotion; and both communities bore a better name than was usual in those times, the numbers for whom the foundation was designed being always kept up, and the estates and endowments being applied to their maintenance and to the relief of the poor in the neighbourhood.

The three years that had passed since the dissolution of that Parliament which had given the first great impulse to the Reformation, had, however, been troublous and stormy ones. Even in the most distant counties the agitation had made itself felt, and the regular clergy instinctively were banding together in defence of their old superstitions, their power, and all that made power sweet.

Within convent walls it was still possible to keep the enemy at bay ; and on account of the ignorance of their inmates, and the spiritual terrors they had at command, the priests still held their sway over the inhabitants of these retreats.

But in the external world the course of events was speeding onwards with resistless energy.

A new Parliament had assembled, and new decrees had been issued. The first Articles of Religion were put forth, in which the new heresy (as it was commonly considered) was plainly visible, and the newly translated English Bible was ordered to be read in every church. It was true that Queen Anne Boleyn, whose influence with the king had been supposed to be dangerous to the old religion, had been executed, and Jane Seymour's short-lived royalty had ended in death ; but then the arch-heretic, Thomas Cromwell, was prime minister, and Cranmer was primate, and, worst of all, the king being now declared to be supreme head of the Church, the appeal to the Bishop of Rome had ceased, and all those mysterious and extensive powers which the heads of the monastic orders in England derived from their foreign chiefs had come to an end. The king had, moreover, determined to press the question of his supremacy to the uttermost, and many had followed the example of Sir Thomas More, and had paid the penalty of their adherence to the Papacy with their lives.

The insurrection in the north had for a short time raised the hopes of the friends of the Papacy, and plots and intrigues with foreign Roman Catholics sprang up in all directions ; but the strong hand that was at the head of the nation put down all these, and sullen murmurs and discontented grumbling alone remained to the discomfited clergy.

Under these circumstances, it may be imagined that it was with no very pleasant feelings that the Abbess of St. Bridget's received the following epistle from the prior of the neighbouring monastery. It was delivered on the evening before our story commences, being intrusted to some safe hand, and ran as follows :—

“The bloodhounds are upon us. Be up and doing, my sister.”

Mother Theresa—for so the abbess was named—was a large and corpulent woman of apparently an advanced age. Her rule in the convent had been one of love rather than of fear. She had never possessed much energy, but she had a considerable share of common sense, and had deemed it the part of wisdom to allow a free development of character to the inclosed nuns, provided that they kept the rule of their order in all important points. The wealth of the establishment was great, and the whole machinery was well ordered and well appointed.

Her adviser in all spiritual as well as all temporal matters was Father Cyprian, a Spanish monk, and the prior of the adjoining monastery of St. Wennon. He was an acute and worldly-minded man, devoted to his country and his order, but anxious to avoid scandal, and to administer the worldly affairs committed to his care with justice. In his anxiety to arouse in Mother Theresa a greater zeal and vigour in the internal government of the convent, he had induced her to appoint a

countrywoman of his own, one Sister Maria, as mistress of the novices ; and this was the counsellor to whom in her perplexity Mother Theresa now betook herself, on receiving the prior's note.

Vespers had been sung, and the evening shadows were playing on the walls of the abbess's private room, when Sister Maria entered.

Her figure showed gaunt and bony through the scant dress of her order. She was far above the middle height ; and as she stood before her superior in absolute silence, with her eyes cast down, her thin lips firmly compressed, and her hands crossed upon her bosom, she appeared more like one of the sepulchral effigies from the convent chapel, supernaturally set up on its feet, than a living woman with a human soul still animating its earthly tenement.

Mother Theresa nervously touched the paper she held in her hand, as if half fearing the apparition she had raised, and at a loss how to begin the colloquy. Clearing her throat two or three times, at last she said, " My sister, I have need of counsel, and I know of none so well fitted to give it as yourself."

Sister Maria raised her eyelids for an instant, and after giving the abbess a searching glance with her keen hawk-like eyes, she replied,—

" I would my reverend mother had a better counsellor than my unworthy self ; but such obedience as I can render is vowed to her and to Heaven."

Yet even as she spoke an expression of scorn passed over her countenance, and died away on her mouth as her features resumed their wonted regularity.

" It is not obedience I am speaking of," said the abbess, rather testily ; " but I need help in suggestion : I look to you

for some cunning device to foil the enemy. I am old and feeble, the vigour has departed out of my life, and I know not what troubles are coming upon me and the community; but something tells me that I shall be the last Abbess of St. Bridget's. Oh! I had thought to lay my bones with the holy dust of buried saints in our own peaceful chapel, where for so many years I have gathered my children at fast and festival; but it may not be—it may not be."

Here the poor old woman wept aloud, while the same look of sarcasm passed over the dark countenance of Sister Maria as she said,—

"But my reverend mother has not yet told me the evil that she fears."

"Take this paper," said Mother Theresa; "read it, and tell me then whether evil is not at hand—even now upon us."

Sister Maria took the paper, and after hastily glancing at its contents, she said,—

"It is even so. Impiety and heresy are running riot in the land. Well did Father Cyprian say, when the holy brethren of the Charter House gained the crown of martyrdom, that the glory of this Church and nation had departed, and that it would be well for themselves if the faithful bestowed the treasures of the sanctuary in other lands before the spoiler came to desecrate it. But my mother could not see it then!" she added, with something of a sneering drawl.

Something like a flush passed over the face of Mother Theresa as she said,—

"I judge not whether it were kindly done to bring up against me as if in reproach the judgment I formed for the welfare of my children. Surely, I thought, holy St. Bridget could preserve her own. And the king, our gracious master, has an English

heart; and though his wrath may be aroused against idle monks and faithless nuns, who bring disgrace upon their sacred profession, yet surely he would respect communities such as ours, where the poor are clothed and fed, and the young are instructed and sheltered."

"You forget, reverend mother, that we offend in one particular, which his Majesty neither forgets nor forgives."

"And what is that, my daughter?" the abbess inquired.

"Have not the great and the noble endowed our house with costly gifts?" Sister Maria replied. "Is there not even in our shrines and chapels enough to tempt the greed of the godless and covetous minions of the king?"

"It is true," said the abbess. "But how can defenceless women like ourselves keep off the hands of the ruthless plunderer?"

"There is yet time—much might be done in the dark hours of the night before the dawn brings the robbers upon us."

"But how?—what would you have done?" asked the bewildered abbess.

"Convene a midnight chapter," said Sister Maria eagerly, her dark eyes gleaming with intense passion. "Swear each sister to secrecy, and give to each who will thus bind herself a certain work. Let the treasures of the house be safely bestowed where no prying eye can discover them; and after the house is dissolved, let us return in secret and carry them to other lands, where no spoiler will dare to come."

"What! carry away the blood of St. Wennon, the bone of St. Bridget, and the splinter of the holy rood that our blessed forefathers brought from Palestine! How then will our poor be cured of their ills? How will the faith of the unlearned be confirmed by miracles?"

"These holy treasures might be placed in pawn for the faithful to redeem when moved to do so by a true sense of their preciousness," the nun replied. "Meanwhile we might take their price with such jewels as we can secure, and found a new community in memory of St. Bridget in Flanders or in Spain, under the protection of his most sacred Majesty the Emperor."

"Speak not to me of any such flight," said Mother Theresa; "but convene the chapter hastily, as you say, my daughter. Then will I lay aside the headship of this community, and name you as my successor. Your election will doubtless be made without question by the sisters, and I will seek a refuge among the poor whom I have succoured. I will lay my body in an English grave, and trust that some few who love me will be found to pray for my unworthy soul."

Sister Maria scrutinized the face of the abbess to see if she really meant what she said, but the old woman was leaning back in her chair with her eyes closed, and motionless. At last she opened them, and seeing the tall figure of the nun still waiting in her presence, she said rather hastily,—

"What! not gone yet? On your vow of obedience, then, I command you to fulfil my words."

Sister Maria bowed deeply, but said nothing, and noiselessly glided away.

The purpose which the abbess had thus announced was not altogether new to the mistress of the novices, and her course of action was prompt and decisive. Without pause or delay she visited each cell, and bore to the inmates the message with which she had been intrusted; and in the silence of night the assembly of the weeping nuns was gathered in the chapter-house. The abbess, in a few words, acquainted them with the calamity that was close upon them. 'The king's visitors, she

said, were merciful men according to their light, and would respect the vested rights of the sisters, inasmuch as food and maintenance would be assured to them for the remainder of their lives; but she could feel no doubt that their common home would be broken up, and a choice given to those among them who were under one-and-twenty of returning to the world. For herself, feeling too old and broken-hearted to be their leader at such a time of trial, she had resolved to bequeath her authority to one who was more equal to guiding the community at this crisis, and who had some expedient to propose for meeting the emergency. She then proposed Sister Maria as her successor. The startled nuns, feeling the need of some strong will to guide them through the hour of peril, elected Sister Maria without further discussion.

In a few impassioned words she addressed them, exhorting them to be true to their vows and their order, and then, after requiring from each an oath of secrecy, unfolded her plans.

She spoke rapidly, for the time was short, but to each sister some task was assigned of securing and concealing the valuables that decorated the images of the Virgin and the saints, and the vessels used in the chapel service; while she herself, being skilled in the art of penmanship, altered the old inventories and wrote fresh ones of the convent property.

They were not too soon; for before the sun was far above the horizon, the convent was beleaguered with a band of men wearing the king's livery, and the bell at the entrance was rung imperiously. The aged portress fumbled amongst her keys and trembled violently, as several sturdy kicks seemed to announce that the person outside had some intention of forcing an entrance. At last the door was opened, and a man-at-arms demanded admission for the king's messenger.

“So please your highness,” said the bewildered old woman, “we are but a few lone women, and can have no business with gentlemen of such high breeding.”

“Nevertheless it is the king’s pleasure that my lord should have a few words with the lady mother here.”

His words were followed by the appearance of the visitor in person, followed by two or three secretaries and a party of gentlemen, who dispersed themselves to take a view of the buildings, as they said; while the visitor, with his confidential assistants, sent the old portress to summon the abbess to meet them in the parlour.

The dissolution of the Convent of St. Bridget was but a repetition of what was taking place in all corners of the land. The visitor, an astute lawyer, and well accustomed to detect impositions of all kinds, soon discovered that the inventories had been tampered with; and his emissaries, grown skilful by much practice, found out the hiding-places of most of the treasures.

The sisters were summoned into the presence of the visitor, where the newly-made abbess was sternly admonished for the frauds for which she was responsible, and threatened with condign punishment. Being, however, a Spanish subject, and the King’s relations with the Emperor being in a critical state at that time, her escape was connived at; and, accompanied by the notable Sister Martha and some few of the more severe of the recluses, she was allowed to leave England a few months later and join a convent in Flanders, where the memory of the English saint was long kept alive by the few remnants of her treasures they contrived to carry with them.

The late abbess found a refuge amongst her ancient retainers, accompanied by Sister Lucy, whose tears fell profusely when

she was told that, in consequence of her being above the prescribed age of twenty-one, her vows must be considered binding, and that a return to the world—that is, to family life—was impossible for her.

The novices were sent back to their relations ; and Cecily, at her friend Evelyn's earnest request, consented to accompany her to the mansion of Squire Vivian, not many miles distant from Pendower.

CHAPTER III.

VIVIAN HALL.

“OW, Cecily, dry your eyes, and let us talk a little,” said Evelyn Vivian, as she reined up her pony and ambled quietly by her companion’s side.

Cecily was mounted on a steady old horse, that, in general, had the honour of carrying Dame Vivian. The two girls were riding on a bare, moorland country, with two serving-men in Squire Vivian’s livery following behind.

“Forgive me, Evelyn. It is ungrateful in me to be sad, when I may well be overpowered with the kindness I meet with from every one. But remember that I am leaving the only mother I have ever known.”

“Yes, I know,” said Evelyn, not very sympathetically. “But before you have been a week at Vivian Hall, you will feel how much better real fathers and mothers are than these religious ones.”

“But you see, Evelyn, your relations cannot become really mine,” replied Cecily.

“Yes, they can. At least, just the same as if they were your own,” said Evelyn. “My mother has often said she wished she had another daughter. I believe, in truth, one reason she persuaded my father into sending me to the convent

was, that she was afraid I should grow up rough and wild from having no other companions than my brothers ; and now she is going to have in you just what she wanted."

"Then it was your mother, and not your father, who wished you to leave home?"

"Yes. My dear old father would never send any of his children away if he could help it ; and, between ourselves, he is not over friendly to monks and nuns. However, as he had known Mother Theresa for many years, he was able to trust me to her. But he will delight in having you at our home, and be so glad you never can be a nun."

"You forget what Sister Maria said," replied Cecily. "I may follow her with the other sisters hereafter, and make my profession in a foreign convent."

"Take my word for it, you will never do that," said Evelyn lightly. "But poor Sister Lucy! How she wept! My heart ached for her. And she so young and so pretty. I am glad she stays with the good old mother, though. We must try and see them some day when everything is settled."

"My heart ached for others besides Sister Lucy," said Cecily. "What will become of the poor who had daily alms from the buttery? And the poor souls in purgatory—who will sing masses for them, if there are no holy fathers to pray and priests to offer daily sacrifices for them? Ah, they are more to be pitied than Sister Lucy! They say that her tears are falling for some earthly idol she loved before she came to St. Bridget's. Her sorrow is an earthly one, and can be cured ; but theirs is eternal!"

"Well, Cecily, it always seems to me that if the Holy Father the Pope has the power, as the priests tell us, of releasing souls from purgatory, he might as well do so at once by a kind of

general proclamation. Just as the king's highness proclaimed a general pardon after the last great insurrection to all who would take the oaths. It were a more fatherly and merciful action, than to leave the poor souls in suffering until some rich person pays a price in money to free them."

"But we used to pray for rich and poor alike," said Cecily. "We know not how many suffering souls may have been freed by our prayers, but we do know that if there is no one to pray, the pains of purgatory must be more binding, more lasting for many a sinner; and when our own turn comes to die, what a weary prospect of refining fires lies before us if all religious persons are banished from the land. Oh, surely the end of all things must be near! False religions and heresies are over-spreading the land, as Father Cyprian truly said in his last sermon. They must be the signs and portents foretold, when the wickedness of the world should be so great that everything must be burned up to purge away the dross."

"Truly," said Evelyn, "it were an evil thing if we had no priests to shrive us; but surely it will not come to that. They say that the king's grace, although he has fallen out somewhat with His Holiness the Pope, yet is a good Catholic at heart, and will maintain the Church. But let us leave these matters. Possibly my brother Edmund will be home from his studies at Oxford. He will talk to you of these high concerns to your heart's content. And then there will be Hugh, my father's right-hand man, as he calls my eldest brother; and Richard and Thomas; and last, but not least, the dear old people themselves."

"Why do you call them old?" asked Cecily. "It seemed to me when I saw the lady, your mother, that she was a goodly person in the flower of her days."

"And so she is; only she is old to me, you know," said

Evelyn. "And then my dear father—his hair is turning gray. He is often away in the king's wars with his men. He has so many cares. But my mother and Hugh look after the estates while he is absent; and Hugh, who has been bred to arms, understands how to drill the lads who are growing up, and can bend a bow with the strongest. He would gladly have gone when my father was last called out; but that, you know, was last Martinmas, when the troubles seemed to be breaking out nearer home, and so my father thought it would be better Hugh should lead his men the first time against a foreign foe than against his own people, and every one said there was soon likely to be work to do either against the French king or the Emperor."

"I remember your saying something of this when you came back after your Christmas holidays," said Cecily. "How little we thought then that your next return would be sudden like this, and that I should be with you!"

"I certainly did not think it was coming so soon; but I well remember my father saying that St. Bridget's turn would come some day, but he hoped it might last out Mother Theresa's time, and then the sooner it went the better. Then it was he told me to send a messenger straight to him should anything happen; and that was why the new lady mother gave her permission yesterday that a serving-man should go over with a token from me, and that Geoffrey the groom and Robert the huntsman came riding post this morning to fetch me home, and whom I would for company."

"To me it seems a startling dream, and I expect to wake and find myself walking with you in the convent grounds, as we were doing in the early morning yesterday when first the alarm was given."

"That will never be again," said Evelyn; "at least, not as it has been. I suppose we must always be going on to something new. Quite the same things never happen again."

"No. I would not have such a day as yesterday over again," said Cecily. "The frightened sisters, the hard and angry men, their profane followers. It is a shame even to think of them. Would you believe it, one of them took the altar-cloth from St. Joseph's shrine to make a saddle-cloth for his charger; and another stripped the lace from the Virgin's robe to take to some lady at home to make her a cap!"

"I have heard of worse things than these," said Evelyn, in a low voice. "I have heard my brother Edmund say, that in London they burn the images of the saints themselves, just as if they were heretics; and that, too, by the leave of my Lord Cromwell. If the master is consenting to such doings, what wonder that the men should act thus. They say that all the precious stones and the plate are sent to the king himself!"

"Alas!" said Cecily, "we must be living in evil times, when anointed kings have such heathen counsellors."

"Look!" said Evelyn, suddenly pointing to some distant, woody hills that were appearing before them as they rode gently up an ascent in the road, "there is home! We can see it a long way off, the country is so open. Those trees stand all round the house, and shelter it from the rough gales that blow across the moors."

"It is not so far as I expected," Cecily replied. "Shall we reach it before sunset?"

"I scarcely know," said Evelyn, looking towards the west, where the sun was already low in the heavens; "but we will try." And putting their horses to a brisk canter, the two girls hastened onwards.

The sun was just beginning to dip behind the high table-land across which they had been riding, when the travellers reached a chestnut avenue leading up a grassy slope to an old manor-house, which was thus thrown back from the little village of St. Edel's. The tender green of spring had just passed into the fulness of summer, and vegetation was rich and luxuriant.

Squire Vivian had too much work for his men to do to allow any time to be given to the embellishment of his estate. The grass was therefore grazed down by a few sheep, and some rough, unbroken ponies, who galloped off at full speed as the cavalcade approached. The baying of a bloodhound, and the barking of several dogs in various keys, gave notice of their arrival to the inmates of Vivian Hall; and Cecily had barely time to notice that beyond the slope they passed through a fortified enclosure surrounding the house, underneath the windows of which were borders set out with summer flowers, when a hearty voice was heard welcoming them, and a strong arm lifted them from their horses, and Squire Vivian, the master of the house, took them each by the hand and led them to the ample porch where Dame Vivian was waiting to receive them. Her bright blue eyes smiled welcome on the stranger, whom she had already seen once before when visiting her daughter at the convent; and Cecily felt that Evelyn had not overstated the truth when she had spoken of the welcome that was waiting for them both. And presently Evelyn's brothers came and gathered round their sister. Hugh, a soldier-like young man, tall and stately, who treated his sister as a pretty toy; and Richard and Thomas, still rough and unpolished lads, only a little older than Evelyn herself, who looked shy and awkward when they found she was accompanied by a beautiful young lady.

Tom, the younger, however, pulled his sister's skirt, and half whispered,—

"Juno has got such a beautiful lot of young puppies ; will you come and see them?—and the young lady too," he added, his natural politeness half overcoming his shyness.

"Cecily—that's her name," said Evelyn. "Will you come?" said she, addressing her friend.

Cecily, not quite knowing what was expected of her, and feeling that Evelyn's brothers were a mystery at present beyond her comprehension, cast an appealing look at Dame Vivian, who came to the rescue, saying,—

"Not now, Tom. I am sure Miss Tremaine must be tired after her long ride, and would like to rest before supper ;" and drawing Cecily's arm within her own, she led her away.

"Come on then, Evy," said Dick ; and away went Evelyn with her brothers, well satisfied to leave her friend with her mother while she made the round of her brothers' pets.

The squire's eye rested on each party of receding figures with an amused expression, as they went out at opposite doors of the great hall which occupied the centre of the house, and turning to Hugh, he said,—

"The pretty convent-bird will find our boys rough company."

"Or no company at all," said Hugh. "She looks half a nun already."

"Wait a while, wait a while," said the squire. "I am not so sure of that. It may be, when she has tasted the sweets of liberty, she'll flap her wings and fly away. Anyway, I'm glad Evy has brought her, poor little thing. When she has recovered her fright, she'll be able to give us a sensible account of what has been done up at St. Bridget's. More so than our own scatter-brained little girl could do, I'll be bound."

"Oh, Evy! Why, one never expects anything of her. She's only a child," said Hugh. And then father and son returned to the occupations which Evelyn's arrival had interrupted.

That night, when all the younger portion of the community had retired to rest, Squire Vivian sat up for a while by the chimney-corner, where some red embers were still smouldering, when Dame Vivian laid aside her needle-work, and, coming to his side, said with some anxiety,—

"Where are your thoughts now, my husband?"

"Rather, where are yours, my wife? 'Tis full ten minutes since I have heard you speak."

"If you ask me, I must say they were with our stranger-guest. What think you of her?"

"A large question enough, dame; but I must confess my mind was wandering on the same scent."

"She is very pretty," said the lady, half interrogatively.

"Pretty! Well, yes; but she is more than that."

"Do you think there is much danger for our boys?" asked Dame Vivian, rather anxiously.

"Bless the woman," said the squire impatiently, "always thinking of her boys! I suppose her boys can take care of themselves. What harm can she do them?"

"They might break their hearts for her," she suggested.

"Break their fiddlesticks!" said the squire. "As if the admiration of a beautiful young woman could do a lad anything but good!"

"But they might want to marry her," persisted the lady; "and what would you say then? You know she has no dowry, only some small allowance from the convent revenue, and that, I suppose, is lost now."

"Well, if they did want to marry her, only one could have

her, and her lineage is as good as theirs ; and as to money, why, in these days, is there not a career open to every lad of spirit, when a butcher's son becomes Lord Cardinal and Primate of all England, and a clothier's son Lord Privy Seal? It is not money that gives distinction, but spirit, energy, a determined will, with good abilities certainly, but less of that than many think."

"What, then, are your thoughts about our fair visitor?" asked Dame Vivian.

"I was thinking what a tool she might be made in the hands of some one who understood how to manage her rightly. She is beautiful, enthusiastic ; I see it in her face. She is all soul, full of what our foreign neighbours call *esprit*. She is a girl who might be made to dream dreams and see visions in a cause in which her sympathies were enlisted—quite a second Nun of Kent."

"I do not think the priest of St. Edel's will encourage her in any such fancies. Certainly not whilst under your protection," said Dame Vivian.

"Probably not. But do you think the Prior of St. Wennon's intends to let everything slip quietly through his fingers. He has a subtle mind, and, from what I have heard Evelyn say, he is more true to his order and his country than to his Church and King. He may choose to use this girl as a means of espial on our household."

"What ! Evelyn's friend, to whom we are ready to give a refuge when her own natural guardians and her assumed ones are both unable to shelter her?"

"I do not say that he will, but only that he may ; and therefore I would warn you, my wife, that the charge you are undertaking may be fraught with peril."

"But yet I cannot see it, my husband; and if it were so, would you have me turn out the motherless child?"

"Not so, not so. You are over hasty," said the squire. "Only remember that these are dangerous times, and Edmund is shortly coming back from Oxford with his head full of the new doctrines that are talked about up there. And though the King has quarrelled with the Pope, yet he will have us all good Catholics; and we might be burned at Smithfield for listening to lighter words than I have heard Edmund use about holy things."

"Edmund! I forgot him," said the lady. "Then, after all, it was at least *one* of the children you were thinking about as well as myself."

"Yes, but in a different way; even as a secret poison is more to be feared than an open blow. If either of the lads should fancy Miss Cecily, the harm that would come of it would not be great, as far as I can see. She can but flout him or have him, and in either case he must make the best of it like a man; but if, under the seal of confession, Father Cyprian should come to know all that is said and done by some of us, it might be an evil day for this household. In the one case, it is God Almighty working, through nature, upon human hearts; in the other, it looks to me very like another sort of power coming out of evil and leading to evil."

"You quite frighten me," said Dame Vivian. "However, depend upon it, I shall watch over Cecily as my own child."

"That is easier said than done. Depend upon it, she looks upon the Abbess of St. Bridget's as her mother; and were it not that I believe Mother Theresa to be a better sort of woman than it is common to find in convents now-a-days, I would have

none of her children here, however much it might grieve Evelyn."

"I always wished that when Evelyn came home she might have the company of some quiet maiden, to lead her to take pleasure in womanly ways, instead of running wild with her brothers; and I more than half hoped, when I sent the second horse yesterday, that I might see Cecily Tremaine come with her. But now your words fill me with doubt and dread."

"We could not have a fairer maiden to sit at our board; and our own wild little daughter has been more gentle and thoughtful since she has made this friend; but these are troublous times, and one knows not to-day who may be foe to-morrow. Therefore all I say is, beware, and nothing but good may yet come of our fair visitor."

"You go out in the great world and hear and see more than I do," said the lady; "but I would fain hope that our peaceful homestead may be undisturbed, and that we may live and die as our forefathers have done before us."

"It may not be, it may not be," said the squire, shaking his head. "The spirit of change is abroad; and yet who knows but it may be for good? But come, it is bed-time, and I must be up with the sun to-morrow, for I shall have my hay down if the weather serve. Get us some breakfast by four o'clock, and see that the women folk are stirring early, my wife."

CHAPTER IV.

EDMUND AND THEODORE.

HE first few days which Cecily spent at St. Edel's were altogether full of excitement and novelty. She had been used to early hours at the convent, and the mistress of the novices being a strict disciplinarian, had taken care that every hour through the day should have its appointed work for those young persons who were placed under her direction. But here there was no altar to deck with fresh flowers, no appointed studies, no embroidery to be done for the garments of the saints; and though every one in the establishment was busy from morning to night, the work was of a kind in which she could give no assistance, and a sense of uselessness crept over her at times as she watched Evelyn with her bare arms making up rolls of beautiful yellow butter, or preparing venison pasties for her father's supper. Sometimes she followed her friend into the hayfield, and attempted to toss the hay with the rest; but the romping games which Dick and Tom kept up with their sister half frightened the quiet convent child, and she was often glad to retreat to Dame Vivian and try to assist her in her household cares.

It was a genial, hearty, out-of-door life, and had its own charms, only she could not quite understand it.

The noisy meals in the great hall, where all met at breakfast, dinner, and supper, were the chief landmarks of the day ; and she was glad when Sunday came round, and the religious services were to be held in church, which had hitherto been her chief interest in life.

Mass was sung at an early hour by the village priest, and all the family from the manor-house were in attendance. It was, however, a somewhat different service to that to which she had been accustomed.

"Well, what do you think?" said Evelyn as they walked home together. "I suppose this is the first time you have heard the English Bible, or the Paternoster and Creed in our mother-tongue."

"Do not expect me to say I like it," said Cecily. "To me it seems like desecration to hear the Word of God read in common and vulgar language."

"I thought you would say so," Evelyn replied. "It rather shocked me at first ; but, do you know, I quite like it now. Indeed, it is the only part of our service at home which I do at all like. We have not the beautiful music they had at the convent, but this English Bible makes up for it, I think."

"I do not know what you mean," said Cecily. "It only shocks me. And what can the poor ignorant people I saw in church think of it?"

"I believe they like it very much," Evelyn replied. "I know they always seem to listen to it. Indeed, I see them with their mouths and eyes wide open, as if they were afraid of losing a word. It was quite different when it was read in Latin : they were talking all the time in whispers ; indeed, all the gossip of the village was told in church."

"But they cannot possibly understand it," said Cecily.

"I don't know why they should not. I think some of the stories in the Bible are far more easy to understand than the lives of the saints, and certainly they are more interesting and beautiful. I never cried so much in my life as when I heard Joseph and his Brethren for the first time; and I believe there are a great many other stories just as good."

"It is quite true that the stories are beautiful," said Cecily thoughtfully; "but it must be a very dangerous book, or the people who read it would not turn heretics, as Father Cyprian says they do."

"Certainly I do not wish to turn heretic and be burned," said Evelyn; "but I suppose the priest reads only the good parts."

"Still I do not like it," said Cecily. "I am sure it is very profane to read it in English to all sorts of people. Such a book must be meant for the religious only, who are able to give the true interpretation to the difficult parts; for others, it must be only a temptation and a snare."

"But you know," said Evelyn, "that it is now more than two years since this has been done; and not only so, I heard my brother Edmund say that as fast as copies can be obtained by means of printing, they are being brought into every church in the land, and everywhere one is chained to the reading-stall, so that those who have learned to read in the parish can go into the church and study it for themselves."

"I should hope there are not many who are so presumptuous."

"Well, there are not many who can read in our parish, but my brother Edmund says that strange things have come about at Oxford through reading that book, and he is half afraid of it, as you are. And yet I noticed he could hardly keep away from it; and when he and I were last at home together, he was

always stealing off secretly to the church. I did not let him know that I observed him, for I thought he did not like it, but I knew it all the same."

"Did he ever tell you what the strange things were that happened at Oxford, of which you were speaking?"

"It was before his time," Evelyn replied. "He had no hand in it at all, and men speak of it under their breath, for it was in the days of the great Cardinal Wolsey. But some strange heretics came amongst the Oxford scholars, and brought with them wicked and heretical books; and the young men met in one another's rooms at night and read them, and there were Bibles among them. At last the great cardinal found it out, and sent word to the governors of the colleges. Then followed such a time as never was heard of before or since. Some of the worst heretics tried to escape, but most of them were taken, and some were punished, and even burned; and the poor foolish young men who had been led astray threw their wicked and perilous books in the fire that was kindled that day at Oxford, and walked in procession, doing penance for their sins."

"Oh that there were such zeal among us now!" said Cecily; "or that the good cardinal were yet alive!"

"Well, I don't know about that," said Evelyn. "I should not like to have my relations burned for reading a book. But times have certainly changed since then. Why, that was twelve years ago!"

"I think that reading a forbidden book is as bad as eating a forbidden fruit, and we all know what came of that," said Cecily.

"Well, that is a temptation that is not likely to come in my way," Evelyn remarked. "You know I am not over fond of reading; but if I were, I could no longer be burned for it. I fancy half the king's lieges would be roasted on fagots, if it

were still counted an offence to read the English Bible. I heard my father say last year, that when first the volume was put in our church, strangers came from far and near to look at it, and some who had learned the art of reading would get whole chapters by heart and recite them to their fellows in the alehouse afterwards. And then they would quarrel over the sense, and the next morning some would be brought before him in the justice-room for breaking the peace and talking heresy."

"And what did your father do?"

"Well, he set them down for a lot of ignorant knaves, and put them in the stocks for a time, and told them if the king's grace heard that the first use they made of his clemency was to break their fellows' heads, he would say they read the Holy Book to little purpose, and would take it away from them. Then they looked scared, and my father having gained himself a reputation for promptness and masterfulness, they thought he might be in my lord king's secrets, and what they have done since they have done quietly."

"You never told me about this English Bible when we were at St. Bridget's," Cecily remarked.

"No. For once at confession Father Cyprian pressed me on the point whether I had ever read in it, and though I could say I had not, it was but truth to tell I had heard it when I was at St. Edel's Church; and then he bound me over not to speak of it to any one at St. Bridget's. The king's grace, he said, had made a great mistake in laying open such a book to the eyes of the secular people, and he doubted not when Queen Anne was put out of the way, and his other evil counsellors removed, he would see his error. Meanwhile it were the greater charity to cover his fault and speak of it to no one;

and I, knowing that 'walls have ears,' at least at St. Bridget's, was well minded to obey him in this particular."

"I did not know you could be so discreet," said Cecily.

"Ah! but it was not because I liked it, but because of the dreary penances and long lessons that were set me if I disobeyed the father. Here, if my confessor did set me a penance, I could pay some one in the village to do it for me; but there I was obliged to do it myself. Oh, I am glad, glad, glad to come home! And now I must hasten back and make some sauce for the meal, and a custard for dinner, and then we will go and see my brothers shoot at the butts in the village. Hugh's men will be there in their uniform, looking brave and gay. They could all draw a bow from the time they were seven years old. And then in the evening we will go and see the players on the village green, and you will see we keep up Sunday at St. Edel's right joyously."

And joyous the day was to Evelyn, and many others followed like it; whilst Cecily watched her friend growing up and changing from the merry convent plaything to the helpful and ready maiden, as one week after another glided by, and Evelyn had a word and a jest for every one, and seemed always to know what to do, and what to say, whilst Cecily still felt herself alone amongst the merry family party.

In the early morning she helped Dame Vivian about her household cares, and learned with Evelyn to attend the dairy, to dress the dinner, and rule the house. Indeed, so expert did she become under the able training she received, that Dame Vivian said, before many weeks were over, that she would sooner trust Cecily than Evelyn to order the house for a week, as she had more head.

The family dinner was at twelve; and when that was over

the squire and his sons went out to hunt or shoot, and the two girls would sit in the deep oriel window which was thrown out from one of the sides of the great hall, and work at their embroidery during the hot afternoons. Often in the evening, when supper was over, the squire sent for the village piper to set the young people dancing—his own sons and the two girls leading off, and the men and maids following ; but they seldom outstayed the sun long in their pastime, for they all got up with him, and hard work was the order of the day, as the barley harvest followed close upon the haymaking, and soon the reapers would be busy with the wheat.

Late one August evening, after a day spent much in this way, a clatter of horses' hoofs was heard on the pavement within the fortifications of the house. Dame Vivian started to her feet and ran to the porch, and was then seen embracing a tall young man of slender frame, who had just alighted from his horse. Evelyn was not far behind her mother ; and the squire and the lads were soon warmly greeting the stranger, whom Cecily understood at once to be Edmund.

As she stood apart in a recess of the hall, she could see that, while he had the bright gray eye peculiar to his family, which so easily lightened with a smile or flashed with anger, his countenance and general appearance showed him to be a student, and not a man of war like his brothers. His face was fair, instead of being brown and sunburned ; and his frame was light and agile, rather than muscular and stately like that of his brother Hugh ; and there was a restlessness of expression which denoted a busy and excitable brain, which allowed its possessor little repose.

Altogether it was a new type of face to her. It was wanting in the rigidity and sharpness of outline which she was accus-

tomed to see in those religious persons who had occasionally visited the convent, and who were pointed out to her as eminent for learning and for sanctity; and yet it was a highly intellectual face, with delicate lines and traces of thought, which it interested her to contemplate.

As she thus stood apart from the family group, an attentive observer, but nothing more, she became aware that she herself was also an object of observation to another person.

Edmund had been followed into the hall by a figure who advanced beyond the door, and then stood leaning on his sword, motionless and unobtrusive, apparently waiting until the family greetings had been exchanged, and his companion would have leisure to present him to his host. Whilst thus waiting, his eye fell on Cecily, who like himself was standing alone, and taking no part in the joyous reunion. Her pensive and thoughtful countenance evidently attracted his attention; and no wonder, for in this young girl's expression and personal appearance everything was harmonious. Her figure was not above the middle height, but was perfectly symmetrical and graceful. Her dark hair fell back in massive coils, and seemed to shade the delicate complexion of her face, which was always white and fair—so that, as she grew up, her companions in the convent had called her "Lily-flower," in exchange for the name of her infancy, "Violet," which had been given her in her uncle's nursery owing to the deep tint of her large soft eyes, which had that peculiar richness of colour which is occasionally seen in combination with a very delicate complexion.

Cecily started on perceiving the second stranger, and slightly moved towards the rest. It was not an unusual thing in this hospitable abode for visitors to come and go, and receive board and shelter, without even their names being asked. It was

enough that they showed by their mien and manners that they had received the breeding of a gentleman ; and their claim to hospitality was simply their need of it.

It was not, therefore, the arrival of another new-comer that had startled Cecily, but rather his appearance, as he stood within the shadow of the entrance, quietly and patiently, and making no sign. In the rapid glance that Cecily threw upon him, his face did not appear unfamiliar to her, though where she had seen it she could form no idea. She could see that he was older than Edmund, and was less evidently a student ; his face was bronzed and somewhat weather-beaten, and it was grave with an earnestness approaching to sternness. His attitude, as he stood in repose, betokened strength ; and yet he bore no warlike accoutrements except his sword. He perceived Cecily's motion, and also changed his position, when Edmund, looking towards him, caught his hand, and leading him to the squire, introduced him simply with the words,—

“An honoured friend, my father.”

Squire Vivian and his lady warmly welcomed their son's friend ; and Evelyn, remembering Cecily, anxiously brought her forward to introduce her to her brother.

“There, Edmund,” she said, “there is one who will be a match for you with all your Oxford book-learning. Cecily can read Latin and French and Spanish. She knows the legends of the saints by heart ; and can repeat verses, both Latin and English, by the dozen.”

Edmund bowed low as he acknowledged the introduction, remarking how unexpected it was to find a lady of such rare learning in his father's hall, and especially that she should condescend to be the friend of such an ignoramus as his little sister Evelyn. At which Cecily smiled, and said that ever

since she had been at St. Edel's she had found that Evelyn's knowledge far surpassed her own on most matters. Then Dame Vivian claimed her long-absent son, and the two girls went to fetch some supper for the travellers, while the squire talked to the stranger-guest.

Whilst the new-comers were refreshing themselves with the food they so much needed (for they had evidently ridden hard that day), the conversation was general, and was chiefly carried on by the brothers, who had much to tell and much to hear; but when supper was ended, and the evening shadows were falling, the squire bid a serving-man bring a fagot and light it on the hearth, and sent him to rest with the others of the household, the family party alone remaining—the only additions being Cecily and the stranger-guest, "Master Theodore," as Edmund called him, using only his Christian name.

"Come, boys," said the squire, "draw up closer to the blaze. I'll warrant the air sniffs of autumn already when evening comes, and the light on the hearth is not amiss to any one."

"To me it is homelike and welcome," said Edmund. "I should scarcely know the old hall without its hospitable blaze."

"Well, Ned, it seems good to have you among us again. But where have you been tarrying? Has the love of learning been so strong upon you that you have been staying among your books, instead of coming to ride and shoot with your brothers?"

"Partly so, my father; and yet not quite. I stayed up at Oxford to finish some studies which had taken hold of my mind, and which I could not quite master; and then came tidings of what the Parliament was doing, and I thought I must go to London town and hear for myself, and bring you

the latest news. Have you heard aught of this new bill they have been putting forth?"

"Somewhat has reached me," said the squire shortly. "They say that my Lord Cromwell's power is tottering, and we may soon have his enemies at the head of affairs."

"Hardly yet," replied his son. "Much depends upon the lady the king chooses for his fourth queen. Should he take a princess from one of the reformed German States, all may yet be well for those who favour the new opinions."

"What! Marry a German and a heretic! Surely King Henry will not demean himself so far!" exclaimed Dame Vivian.

"Would you rather that he married a Spaniard, or a French Catholic?" asked Edmund. "Would you like the Pope let into England again, with his indulgences, his forfeits, his exactions, and his army of foreigners? Surely, mother, we are well rid of these."

"No, no," said the squire. "We want none of that back again. But there are amiable and noble ladies in the king's own dominions, with whom he might wed without disturbing the old faith or the new."

"But the old faith is disturbed," said Edmund. "I have heard that in one church, when the priest lifted the Host for the people to worship, a man in the congregation lifted a little dog in derision; and in most of the large towns there are those who only mock at priests and their miracles. And this has so alarmed the orthodox, that they have followed my Lord of Norfolk, Bishop Gardiner, and other chief men in the kingdom, and have enacted grievous penalties for all who offend against the Six Articles of Faith put forth in this session,—‘the whip with six strings,’ as it is called by some."

"And what said my Lord Cranmer?" asked the squire.

"He stood up against it like a man; but in vain. The tide ran too strong against him. My Lord Latimer has resigned his bishopric; and all men are aghast, and know not what to say. In the first fortnight after the Act was passed they indicted five hundred persons in London alone; and when they began to burn and to slay, I thought it were better to take flight and leave the capital, if not the kingdom."

"And is there no appeal?" asked Dame Vivian.

"Yes; to the king, and he saves whom he can. They dare not to harm either my Lord Cranmer or Latimer while he lives. He surely thinks they are dealing too roughly with his faithful lieges."

"Too roughly! too roughly!" said the squire, shaking his head. "For every heretic they burn or slay, ten will spring up to carry on the work. Too much zeal, and too little wisdom."

Master Theodore had taken no part in the foregoing conversation, but at the close he broke in,—

"And yet not so: for must not the chaff be winnowed from the grain?"

"That is as you may take it," said the squire. "For my part, it is hard to say which is the chaff and which the grain. But whisht! no more to night, or one of us may be talking heresy, and to-morrow night may find us extended on the rack, or sleeping on the floor of a damp dungeon, instead of enjoying our freedom by this comfortable fire. I knew not matters had gone so far."

CHAPTER V.

FATHER CYPRIAN.

“ECILY,” said Evelyn, as the two girls were walking home from mass, a short time after Edmund Vivian’s return home, “what think you of my brother’s friend, Master Theodore?”

Cecily hesitated. At last she said, “I would rather not think at all. Why do you ask me?”

“Only that, if I could have chosen, I had rather my brother had come alone; or if he must have brought a friend, that it had been some one rather blither in his ways. Did you see him last Sunday? He never came down to the archery or the tilt-yard, but the whole afternoon he sat in the hall bending over those writings, in what might be magical characters for anything I know to the contrary.—What were they, Edmund?” said she, addressing her brother, who had just joined them.

“What do you want to know?” said he.

“Why, what are those writings which you and Master Theodore are so fond of studying together?”

“I suppose you mean the New Testament Scriptures in Greek,” he replied. “Master Theodore is my tutor, and with his assistance I am trying to learn Greek; but it is almost a

new study, and till I met with this good friend there was no one in Oxford who either could or would assist me."

"But why should you learn it?"

"Because I wish to study the New Testament Scriptures in the language in which they were written."

"What difference can that make? If you can read the Scriptures in Latin and in English, surely that is enough."

"Enough for some, but not enough for those who have to make up their minds on the great questions which are distracting the world." And he glanced at Cecily, to see how his words affected her; but her face betrayed no interest in what was passing. After a pause, he continued,—“You know, Wycliffe’s translation was made from the Latin; but now this new Bible put forth by authority is from the Hebrew and Greek, and you can see for yourself that there is a difference between this and the old.”

“I cannot see for myself,” said Evelyn, “because I never read either; I must leave that to great students like you and Master Theodore. But I must say I think it makes you both very dull; and I cannot see why what was good enough for the learned men of past ages should not be good enough for you.”

“These are the thoughts of a child; and a child you are, though a very dear one. Miss Tremaine, I am sure, must see the importance of what I am saying,” he added, addressing Cecily.

“Indeed,” said she, “I think that Evelyn has the right on her side. I am but an unlearned maiden, and would not presume to meddle in such matters; but I cannot see why any one should have to make up their minds afresh, when the authority of the Holy Church teaches truth so plainly to her obedient children.”

"Do you mean to say," asked Edmund, "that you have never had any doubts whether what is taught you is really truth?"

"Never," said Cecily emphatically.

"But," persisted Edmund, "suppose you were taught something that is manifestly impossible?"

"Nothing is impossible to faith," Cecily replied.

"Cannot you even imagine that you might have doubts?" continued Edmund.

"I can imagine it, just as I can imagine falling into any other sin."

"Then I suppose you would undergo discipline until you ceased to doubt?"

"You are supposing a case that has never occurred to me," Cecily replied. "But of course I should confess such a sin, and it would depend on my confessor what discipline I underwent."

"You would not seek a more certain guide?"

"How could I? I know that divine authority has been given to my confessor for the express purpose of saving souls. I could not depend on a more certain guide."

"Not the voice of God himself?"

"How can I hear it except through the Holy Church?"

"Surely it is to be found in his written Word."

"No doubt it is, by his priests; but forgive me when I say that it does not seem to me that you yourself have found it, otherwise why should you doubt?"

"I am a member of the same Church as yourself, and I have felt just as you do now. May the saints forgive me if I am wrong; but since I have gone into the great world many things have changed their aspect to me, and I would more perfectly

assure myself of the truth. I could envy the calm assurance which you possess, Cecily, if I may call you by that name."

"Call me as you will," said she. "The name of one who is plighted to Heaven is of little moment; it will soon be laid aside."

Master Theodore at this point joined their company, and looked at Cecily with an expression of surprise and pity, while Edmund said,—

"I thought—indeed, Evelyn told me—that purpose of yours had been laid aside."

"It is true that it has been defeated by circumstances, and I know not how long it may be deferred; but the world, as you represent it, and as others seem to find it, is no such place of rest that I should desire it."

"And yet the soldier talks not of rest till the victory is his," interposed Theodore.

"Ah! there it is," said Edmund uneasily, passing his hand across his brow. "Peace comes as a sweet vision to tantalize me; but where does she abide?"

"Never on earth when sought as an end," said Master Theodore; "but she comes unbidden, unsought, the gift of God: sometimes as the death-blow of all earthly hopes; sometimes to crown the passing soul at the hour of martyrdom."

And Theodore's face for a moment relaxed its sternness, and an expression of sweetness stole over it, as if such a heavenly visitor were not unknown to him, and as if the martyr's fires might some day be his goal.

Cecily shivered, and Evelyn took her arm and drew her away, whispering, "Come away from that gloomy man. It makes my heart sick to hear him." Cecily said nothing, but

followed her into the house ; while Edmund, looking after them, said,—

“That young girl’s face is as the embodiment of peace itself. She is truly a most sweet saint.”

“It is the mirror of calm water over which no storm has yet passed,” said Theodore.

“Can any storms ruffle so fair a surface?” said Edmund. “I could fancy in the convent’s shade she would live in deep repose, and pass from earth to heaven a purified saint.”

“Your imagination runs away with you,” said Theodore. “We do not read in the Holy Book that God’s saints were thus made. Under the austere rules of some of the severer orders the heart of this fair maiden might stiffen into stone.”

“I would, then, that the statue might be ever before me,” returned Edmund impetuously ; “’twould help my orisons.”

Theodore looked at him with surprise, but said no more. He noticed, however, that in the autumn evenings, instead of lingering with his brothers in the stables and kennels, Edmund would hasten to the chimney-corner where the two girls, with Dame Vivian, were sitting at their spinning, and would endeavour to draw Cecily into conversation. Curiosity sometimes induced him to watch whether she evinced any interest in his approaches, but he never could discover that she did.

Frequently Edmund would join him in his studies, and then, when verse by verse they read together the Greek and the English Testaments, searching out differences and discussing difficulties, he thought Cecily was listening ; but it might have been only a surmise, for she never made any remark on what she heard, only she was perfectly silent, while Evelyn and her mother conversed together in an undertone.

Once in the early autumn Master Theodore came out in

quite a new light. It was the feast of St. Edel, the tutelar saint of the village, when a general holiday was held, and there were riding, and wrestling, and shooting with the long bow, with feasting for all. Upon this occasion Master Theodore laid aside his student's dress, and putting on an archer's suit which he had obtained for the occasion, he went down to the butts to shoot with the rest.

To the surprise of every one, he appeared a master of the art ; beating even Hugh in the unerring aim he took, and shooting at the longest range with the squire's heaviest bow.

Towards the close of the trials of skill the old gentleman came up to him, and patting him heartily on the shoulder, "Bravely done, bravely done," said he. "I knew not we had such a marksman in our silent scholar."

Theodore turned round with a pleased smile. "'Tis a long time since I have bent the bow ; but I am well content not to have forgotten my father's training."

It was the first time he had ever alluded to his early life, or betrayed other tastes than those of the hard-working student, and the squire had too good manners to press any inquiries that might be painful ; but from that time he sought his company much more, and Dick and Tom found that he was apt, not only in shooting, but in many field-sports, which their own brother Edmund had long ago abandoned.

Thus it happened that, excepting in the hours which were devoted by the friends to study, very little of their time was spent together ; Edmund preferring the company of Evelyn and Cecily, and Theodore being laid hands on by the lads, if not already engaged by the squire or Hugh, who more and more appreciated his brother's friend.

It was evident by his conversation and general bearing that

he had travelled far, and mixed freely with all orders of men ; yet it was difficult to guess his age, or forecast his future career. It was evident that, although no mere bookworm, his researches as a scholar gave him his highest pleasure. On those quiet evenings to which allusion has been made, a look of pleased contentment shone upon his face, in curious contrast with the half-anxious and careworn expression of Edmund's countenance ; but yet deep lines of thought made him appear many years his senior.

In the morning, however, when in the hunting-field with Hugh, he entered into the sport with so much eagerness and activity, that it was hard to say which of the two men was the elder ; and yet Hugh was only two years older than Edmund.

Thus time went on, and the happy family-life was undisturbed by any external incident. Edmund did not return to his studies at Oxford, for he assured his father that, with so ripe a scholar as Master Theodore, he was making a better use of his time than at the university itself ; and till he could see his way more clearly through the difficulties that beset him, it was of no avail to hasten to take his degree. To this the squire and Dame Vivian readily assented, being nothing loath in such dangerous times to keep their children as far as might be under their protection in their own homestead.

It was in vain for Theodore to talk of going ; nobody could spare him, and it appeared to suit him well to live in this retreat, pursuing those studies which he had in common with Edmund.

Cecily, too, had made her way to all hearts, especially Dame Vivian's. The good lady thought she saw in her son Edmund

a growing partiality for her *prétegee*. And this was satisfactory to her in many respects.

In the first place, she attributed his desire to study at home to Cecily's presence there ; and in this perhaps she was right. Then, being a good Catholic herself, and having a wholesome horror of Edmund's new and dangerous opinions, she hoped Cecily might be an antidote to these, knowing well the firmness of her religious convictions. Her influence, too, upon Evelyn, was all that she had wished ; and a pitying love had awakened in her heart for the orphan girl, which made her wish to rescue her from a foreign convent, a destiny she could not bring herself to desire for her own daughter.

The Christmas of 1539 was kept up right merrily ; the more so that news came down into the country that the king had entered into alliance with the Protestant princes of Germany, and was on the point of cementing the alliance by a marriage with Anne of Cleves ; and when, in January in the succeeding year, the bells were ordered to be rung for the arrival of the new queen and the marriage of the king, Edmund's face lightened as he said,—

“The day is surely come when the hand of the persecutor will cease, and Church and State will move hand in hand towards a blessed futurity.”

“Do not be too sure of that,” said the squire. “It behoves all men to walk warily. The king's health is said to be breaking, and there is then nothing but the life of a feeble child between the party of liberty and such a persecution as the world has never seen. If the Princess Mary comes to the throne, we shall have back the Spanish alliance and the supremacy of the Pope, with a whole army of infuriated monks, burning to take vengeance on those who shortened their power.”

When April came, and the Parliament met, a pause and a hush seemed to fall on everybody. The squire tilled his lands, the lads fished, and Evelyn tended her farmyard. Then flying rumours came from London that the king was not best pleased with the queen ; that the Protestant alliance would soon be at an end ; that the Bishop of Winchester and the Duke of Norfolk were gathering their forces ; and that the Catholics were in the ascendant at court. A little later, and every one was struck dumb with the news of the fall of Cromwell, the divorce of the new queen, and renewed powers given by Parliament to the clergy to track out heretics, to imprison, to torture, and to put to death. A terrible thunder-cloud seemed to have burst, for there was scarcely a family some of whose inmates were not more or less liable to suspicion ; and rich and poor alike lived under the shadow of a great dread.

Rather more than a year had elapsed from the time Cecily had left St. Bridget's, when one Friday morning, on going to the church to make her usual weekly confession, she observed that the figure awaiting her was not that of the priest of St. Edel's, who had been her spiritual father ever since she had been at the manor-house, but in his stead she saw the tall spare form and severe lineaments of Father Cyprian.

During the whole time of her residence at St. Bridget's this monk had never been her confessor ; but she had heard from others, especially from Evelyn, how deep and heart-searching his examination was ; and as she knelt before him, a feeling of awe crept over her. Not that her conscience accused her of having contracted any taint of heresy. Nor was she aware of any wavering in her purpose of self-dedication ; but she trembled as she almost *felt* the spiritual influence of the most dreaded, and also the most revered, of the fathers of St. Wennon's.

She remained in the confessional nearly two hours, while Father Cyprian scrutinized every action and every feeling which his questions recalled. Her very confessions during the past year were analyzed ; and she felt as if her soul were the object of inspection through a powerful microscope to this master-mind. Her relations with each member of the squire's family were examined, especially with Edmund, until at last she became so perplexed, between her desire to speak the exact truth, and her fear of conveying a feeble impression by what she said, that, weary and exhausted, she burst into a hysterical flood of tears.

Father Cyprian handed her some water, and told her to compose herself ; that when she had answered one question more he should be content. When he saw that she was once more mistress of herself, he asked, casually, whether any strangers had been in the habit of frequenting the manor-house while she had been there.

Cecily answered that some few had come and had their meals and gone again.

"Recollect yourself, my daughter," said he. "Has no stranger been abiding there as a harbour or refuge?"

"I know of none," said Cecily ; "unless, indeed, Master Edmund's tutor may be called such."

"And what may this gentleman's name be?" asked the priest.

"They call him 'Master Theodore,'" Cecily replied ; "but I know no more."

"That will do for to-day, my daughter," said the monk. "And now, before I give thee thine absolution and blessing, tell me whether there is aught thou desirest of me."

Cecily hesitated, and then said,—

"I would know, father, whether I may cherish the hope

of rejoining the community of St. Bridget in their distant home ? ”

“ You have made a good confession, my daughter,” he replied ; “ and I see that there is yet work for you in the world, before your heavenly espousals can take place. In the meantime, rest in peace ; your soul is untainted with the poison that is abroad, and you may with safety remain where you are. I shall see you from time to time, and shall be near you when you know it not. And now receive the Church’s gift to the penitent soul, with heavenly benediction.”

As Cecily rose from her knees, a strange feeling of exaltation came over her. Never before had she felt so humbled, so utterly prostrate, as when kneeling before this heaven-sent messenger, as he appeared to her. And now a load was lifted from her heart, and, light as air, she almost fled from the church to the solitude of her own chamber.

It however happened that before she reached the house she encountered the squire going forth on his morning rounds.

“ How now, Lily-flower ! ” said he ; “ whither have you been to gather such early roses instead of lilies ? ”

Cecily looked indeed flushed and excited, and different to her wont, which had attracted Squire Vivian’s attention.

“ Only to confession, sir,” she replied.

“ I fear my old friend Father Andrew has been setting you some hard penance, for the roses look to me as if they had had dew upon them.”

“ Oh no, no, sir ! And it was not Father Andrew, but Father Cyprian, who confessed me to-day.” And so saying, she passed into the house.

“ Father Cyprian, was it ! ” said the squire to himself. “ And what can bring that meddling old monk down here ! No good,

I'll be bound. But if he attempts to molest us, I have a nut for him to crack that he will not like." And the squire walked away with his hands in his pockets, deep in meditation.

It was summer time, and the long, warm evenings tempted the young people to linger in the open air till the moon rose, and Dame Vivian's warning voice was heard from her garden-plot near the house calling them in to rest and sleep. This evening Cecily slipped away from the others, and wandered by herself in the chestnut avenue, thinking of Father Cyprian's words, and wondering what the work was of which he spoke, which might retard her making her profession. Life had been going smoothly with her at the manor-house of late, interests had gathered round her, and her mind had been called out and occupied with the thoughts suggested by her intercourse with Edmund and his Oxford friend. She no longer felt a unit and a stranger, and had no restless yearnings for convent life, and, as Father Cyprian so willed it, she was well content to remain where she was.

As she was thus meditating, the dusky shadows fell around her, and the owls and moths flapped past her under the trees. She quickened her steps, and was drawing towards the house, when she saw a tall white object approaching by the path she was following. Startled at this sudden appearance, she paused for a moment, when, as it continued to advance, she thought she could discern the figure of one of the orders of begging friars in his long white robe.

Gathering up her courage, she proceeded on her way, when, as they were on the point of meeting, the moon shone out, and it seemed as if the wayfarer for the first time perceived Cecily. He drew aside from the path to allow her to pass, and stood still as she did so, holding out one hand, as if asking

alms, and with the other pointing to his mouth, and shaking his head.

A strange feeling came over Cecily. Had she dreamt of this occurrence? or what was there in it that was familiar to her? It was the same feeling she had had once before, when she had encountered Master Theodore's gaze on his first arrival at St. Edel's.

Startled and surprised, but understanding by the gesture that the stranger had need of something, but was hindered from speaking either by a vow of silence or by being really dumb, she hastily detached a golden reliquary from a chain which she always wore round her neck, and giving it to the suppliant, quickly passed on. She saw, however, that his hands were clasped as if in prayer, and that he stood looking after her till she had passed the entrance-gate.

CHAPTER VI.

QUESTIONINGS THAT ARE NOT FOR PEACE.



THE morning following Cecily's confession to Father Cyprian, the squire and his sons were up before the dawn. They had planned an expedition to a distant part of his estate, where they hoped to have some otter-hunting.

Cecily heard the clatter of horses' feet on the paved yard beneath her window, and the voices of the horsemen, and therefore was not surprised when she came into the hall to find the remains of a hasty breakfast on the table, and only Dame Vivian and Evelyn left behind. Evelyn was disappointed at not being of the party, as she would have liked to see the sport. However, her mother, being a notable housewife, had announced that she had sundry domestic matters in hand in which she required the assistance of the two girls; and the squire had decided that Evelyn should stay with her mother, especially as he said that, if the sport was good, their absence might extend over two or three days.

Dame Vivian, having the house to herself, soon set to work in good earnest. There was the tapestry to be cleaned and repaired in the best room; cupboards and corners in every part of the house to be put to rights; fruit to be gathered in

and preserved ; wine to be made ; and such a variety of household affairs requiring attention all at once, that the three ladies were not sorry that the hunting party were absent for nearly a week. They found, indeed, so much to do, that when, late one evening, the dogs rushed home, announcing with noisy voices the near approach of their masters, Cecily said—"What a pity ! here they are. We should have finished the gooseberry-wine to-morrow."

Hungry and tired the hunters came in ; and as they refreshed themselves with a substantial supper, which was soon on the table, the lads dilated on the pleasures of the past week, while Evelyn listened with eager interest.

Cecily remarked, however, that one of the party was missing, and that Edmund had returned without his friend. No one else appeared to notice his absence, and she concluded that he was lingering behind and would appear ere long.

When the whole of the next day went by, and no Master Theodore came back, she began to wonder at his absence, and remarked upon it to Evelyn.

"Oh !" said Evelyn lightly, "did you not know that Edmund said, the morning he went away, that it was likely Master Theodore would not return here for a while ?"

"No," said Cecily ; "I did not hear it. And did he take his leave of you that morning before he rode forth ?"

"No," Evelyn replied. "I was not downstairs when he went away. Truth to tell, I was crying in my room because I could not go ; and Edmund came to wish me good morning before he went, and he promised to bring me some beautiful skins as a sort of make-up ; and then I think he said Master Theodore was going to travel in foreign parts. But I cannot

rightly remember what he said, for I was thinking of the sport. I had never seen an otter-hunt, and did so wish to go."

Cecily was pained and sorry; half vexed with herself that she had not hastened downstairs before the party set forth, and also pained that Master Theodore should have taken so little account of her as not to think her worthy of a farewell. She knew that she had purposely kept out of the way that morning, because she had not Evelyn's love of sport; and, indeed, she could not understand how such grave persons as Edmund and his tutor would find any pleasure in the excitement of the chase. Theodore's taste for such amusements especially surprised her, as, in spite of some peculiarities about him, she regarded him more as a religious than a secular person, and now that he was gone, she found out how that, unknown to herself, she had caught the habit of listening for his opinion and waiting for his remarks. Certainly with his departure something had passed out of her daily life that could not be replaced by any of the party around her. She could not tell why this should be so, for she had very little personal intercourse with him; only his presence seemed to give a higher tone to the family life, and was an interest to herself that she had not realized till he was gone.

His name was rarely mentioned by any one, and no tidings came of him,—at least, to her knowledge,—and he seemed to have vanished from her horizon as suddenly and mysteriously as he came upon it.

Public events, meanwhile, were not reassuring. The execution of Cromwell, and the king's recent marriage with a niece of the Duke of Norfolk, gave the enemies of the Reformation a fresh spell of power; and had it not been for the king's consistent support of Archbishop Cranmer, and his determination

to insist on his own supremacy in Church as well as State, the Roman Catholics had well-nigh triumphed. This formidable bulwark, however, somewhat stemmed the tide of persecution; and it frequently happened that the persecutors were caught in their own traps, and, failing in their recognition of kingly power, they received the punishment they had designed for others.

Christmas came, but it was not a joyous Christmas, as the last had been. Even the ring of the squire's laugh was not so hearty as it used to be, and sometimes it broke off with a hollow sound, as if his soul was not in it. No one remarked upon the change, which was nevertheless felt in some degree by all; for all knew that a terror—the terror of spiritual thralldom, the greatest of all that can afflict a land—was near upon them, and even partly present. Besides this, each had a human heart with its own fears, its own desires, unexpressed, but nevertheless its own exclusive possession, and often its own peculiar burden; and in this family the strong affection that each bore the other withheld them from speaking out thoughts and feelings that would be a cause of sadness to the rest. And thus month after month rolled on with a monotonous sameness that was felt even by Evelyn.

Cecily's gentle cheerfulness at this time made its way to all hearts. She had less to hope for, less to lose, than the others; and yet she was full of sympathy for the cares of all, and in some strange way she became the confidante of each.

She knew how the squire saw troubles approaching for his country, which might come upon it and engulf all that his heart held dear, when his own strong arm was laid low, and he was unable to stand between them and ruin.

She knew that Dame Vivian felt these forebodings also,

though she saw the danger less clearly than her husband ; but she suffered because he did ; and, superadded to this, she dreaded the day when she would have to give up any one of her beloved ones to the cruel world outside.

Then she knew that the younger ones were longing to try their wings and go forth into life ; that Hugh's soul was almost consumed with an ardent desire to gain for himself a name, and to signalize his family and his retainers in the first field of open warfare that presented itself ; and that Dick and Tom were burning to follow their father and their elder brother into the field of military fame, and that they were eagerly watching for the indications of a break with some foreign power, that they might go forth, as they believed, to conquer.

Even Evelyn, her own friend, she was aware, did not find home that perfect paradise she had expected when she left the convent. The fear which every man felt for his neighbour caused families to stand aloof from one another ; the subtle shades of religious difference, backed as they now were with penalties and punishments, made such differences in some cases a matter of life or death. And so there was no genial intercourse between the great families ; no gay young knights coming to ride and shoot with Evelyn's brothers ; no gatherings where all met on equal terms, and vied with each other in jousness and gaiety. Home life had become monotonous, and Evelyn was sometimes even a little querulous at the successive round of domestic events, and impatient for more excitement and amusement.

As to Edmund, Cecily had felt much sympathy for him when, after the departure of his friend Theodore, she saw him following his studies alone ; and thinking to please and cheer him, she agreed to a proposal that he made to her the following

winter, that he should teach her Greek, and she should teach him Spanish. This arrangement went on for some time, and yet the expression of sadness that first attracted her gentle nature did not pass away from his countenance, but rather became more settled and habitual.

She was not insensible to this, but it only caused her to redouble her efforts to interest and divert his mind. At last one day, after sighing deeply, he said,—

“How I envy you, Cecily!”

“What can you find to envy me for?” she replied.

“For much. I envy you your trust, your cheerfulness, and your strong convictions.”

“But surely you have the last,” she replied; “at least, you always speak as if you had.”

“I sometimes think that I have,” he said; “but yet, when the time comes for action, I know I have not; at least, not such as I desire. I am always perplexed, and do not know for certain what is best.”

“Then why do you not consult your confessor?” Cecily inquired.

“My confessor! Good old Father Andrew has walked within a narrow groove all his life, and never suffered himself even to look to the right or to the left. You do not really think, Cecily, he could prescribe the right medicine for a mind so sick as mine.”

“I should not if it depended upon himself; but you know he has Divine authority, like any other priest.”

“Ah, Cecily, there comes in your trust; but my faith in priestly power is past and gone. Do not look so shocked. I am not an infidel; only I cannot see where faith ends and credulity begins.”

"But the authority of the priests has never been broken ; it has come down from the Source of truth itself. And then, you know, it is attested by miracles."

"If you had read more of the Divine Book," Edmund replied, "you would know that in very ancient times there were lying prophets, who pretended to work miracles in proof of their authority ; and such, I more than suspect, is the case now. Then, as to their deriving their authority from a Divine source, surely a tree is known by its fruits ; and I should like to know which of the characteristics of the priesthood at all resemble its Founder ?"

"I can only say," replied Cecily, "that all the religious people I have known have been eminent for their sanctity."

"You accept the test, then," said Edmund quickly. "If so, you have only to live long enough, to find the rottenness of the staff on which you are leaning."

"Perhaps I have given you the wrong answer," said Cecily confusedly. "I will ask Father Cyprian the next time I see him. But, indeed, I ought not to discuss such subjects ; they are too deep for me."

"Rather forget that I have spoken of my own miserable doubts to you," said Edmund. "I cannot make you better than you are, though I might make you nearly as unhappy as myself ; only, should it ever occur to you that your spiritual adviser is giving you counsel which your own purer nature rejects, remember this much, that although there is much that is mysterious and difficult to our human intellect to understand, yet we have in Divine Revelation clear and unmistakable principles of action, and for these we cannot have a surer guide than God's own Word."

"I suppose not," said Cecily, thoughtfully ; "but I cannot

imagine that I shall ever have spiritual advice given me which does not agree with that."

"I once thought the same," said Edmund. "Perhaps, if I had never gone to Oxford I should think so still. But I cannot help my thoughts: I do not know that I would if I could. I *cannot*, for instance, believe that priests have power to appoint and remit penances at their discretion, or that their power extends to permitting rich persons to pay poorer ones to perform their penances for them; and yet I heard of a rich man who was commanded to abstain from pleasant food for seven years, and he satisfied the priests by paying eight hundred and forty men to fast for him three days on bread and water!"

"Perhaps the charity of the rich man counted for something," said Cecily.

"I do not read in the Holy Book of any such bartering of human virtues with Divine justice. There I read that all forgiveness is freely given. No mention is made of penance or priestly intervention between man and his Maker, no buying and selling of spiritual blessings with earthly dross, no interceding army of saints, no mediating Virgin, no—"

"Oh, stop, stop!" said Cecily; "I have all along been afraid that you were talking heresy, and now I am sure of it. When any one attempts to disparage the blessed Virgin, they must be very wrong. I cannot read with you or learn with you any more. I hope I have not done wrong already, but every day I will repeat a special rosary for the benefit of your soul."

"Do not say such cruel words," said Edmund. "I will promise to trouble you no more with my unhappy thoughts; only do not take away the one, the only pleasure remaining in my life."

"Alas!" said Cecily, "but the times we live in are bad, hard

times. I dare not hear you say such things. They might come to my remembrance at confession, and I know not whether the seal of secrecy would prevent my confessor from following up the sin of heresy, even in your father's house, were it to be found there. And he has been so good to me! I would not be the unwilling means of bringing fresh care upon him."

"It is, then, for my father that you care," said Edmund, somewhat bitterly. "You would see *me* led forth to burn, because maybe my conscience would not let me bow the knee to some painted image bedecked with gewgaws, or because I claim the right to use the understanding which God has given me, or because—"

"Hush!" interrupted Cecily; "do not say so. How could I bear to seem to repay with ingratitude all the kindness I have received from you as well as from the rest!"

"Do not add to my pain by talking of kindness between you and me, Cecily. Have you no feeling? Cannot you imagine what it must be to me to hear such words from you? I! who am tempted to sacrifice my soul by saying I believe that to be truth which is truth to you, if it were not that your own purity and goodness would condemn me for daring to approach you with a lie."

"What are you saying?" said Cecily, now fairly frightened by his impetuosity. "What can you mean? I sought in my poor way to fill the void your friend had left, and now—"

"It was pity, then, that led you to conquer the difficulties of a difficult cipher and unknown tongue—nothing more. Simply the impulse of compassion for a weary animal whose yoke-fellow had left him to plod on the dusty highway alone. I had thought—I hoped that you had recognized a kindred soul, and that

in some faint degree you were beginning to find that I was necessary to you, even as you are to me."

Cecily groaned, and hid her face in her hands.

"Oh, this weary world!" said she at last. "When will misunderstandings cease! I see I have been wrong; but yet I thought you knew that my portion is not to be as you say—that in community life no one especially can ever be necessary to me. Holy St. Bridget will take me as her child. I shall have fathers, mothers, sisters in her alone, and heaven for my own."

"A dream, a dream, Cecily! Oh, wake up at the calling of one who knows you better than you know yourself. Have I not seen you as a ministering angel in this family? Do I not know what you are to myself? what you might be if you would?"

Then Cecily rose up with tearful eyes. "Alas!" she said, "I, who only desired to do you good, have done you a great harm. I must humble myself, and endeavour to undo the wrong I have done. May Heaven forgive me, for I meant it not. But we meet not as before; so far I see my way. I would fain make you hate me, rather than you should thus deceive yourself."

Edmund sought to detain her, but Cecily broke away from him weeping, and, with a sense of pain and disquietude such as she had never experienced before, she fled to her room; and there, prostrate before a crucifix which hung over her bed, she remained on her knees for several hours repeating a penitential office, until a sense of numbness crept over her mind, and of faintness over her body.

She did not rejoin the family gathering until supper time, when she hoped the dim light of the old hall would cause her tear-stained countenance to escape observation. Neither Hugh

nor Edmund were present at the beginning of the meal, but towards its close they came in together, and Cecily heard Edmund say to his brother,—

“I will take your advice, and speak to my father to-night.”

He looked reproachfully at Cecily, but she avoided his eye, and only waited in the room long enough to hear him say,—

“I have been thinking, father, that it would be well for me to go and see how matters are up at Oxford. If it is all pretty quiet, I shall stop there awhile and try and take my degree ; but if the place is too hot for me, I might, perhaps, study at some foreign university until the storm is blown over.”

Cecily did not hear the squire’s answer ; but the next day she saw Dame Vivian sorting and arranging Edmund’s clothes, and she fancied there was something reproachful in her manner to herself. Evelyn, too, was busy sewing, and making everything ready for her brother’s departure, which, she told Cecily, was to take place early the following week ; adding, that she wondered he had stayed so long, when he was free to move and see the world. But Cecily kept her own counsel, as to any share she might feel she had in this sudden resolve. She only was very watchful never to allow Edmund to find her alone, as the more she thought over their last conversation the more embarrassing she felt her own position.

Nevertheless, the evening before he went away he suddenly came to her in a workroom, where she had retired under pretence of attending to some domestic affairs for Dame Vivian.

“Cecily,” he said, “you are not angry with me?”

“Angry!” she replied. “Why should I be angry with you, when I have so much reason to be angry with myself?”

“You have reason,” he said ; “and I see it. I have troubled

your peace by endeavouring to make you see falsehood as I see it, when I have nothing certain to give you in exchange ; and it was selfishly done."

"You have not troubled my peace in the way you think," said Cecily ; "but I am cut to the heart when I see that if it were not for me, and for my presence in this family, you would remain here and be a solace to them all."

"Again I see it is not for me but for my family that you regret my departure. If it is so, I can easily provide you with comfort ; for had it not been for you, and your presence in this house, I had not stayed behind when Theodore left us. He warned me that you were a snare in my way. And now I am going forth—to what I know not, but I desire to seek the truth ; and, Cecily, will you not bid me God speed, will you not say that some day you will welcome me back ?"

"My lot is not in my own hands," said Cecily. "I may not be here when you return, therefore I can promise no welcome—except in heaven, should it be ordained that I am the first to reach that happy land of peace. But God speed I will wish you ; and that you may find the truth you seek, although it may be where you think not."

"And is this all ? Have you no kinder farewell to give me ?"

"Nothing but my poor prayers."

"No token that I may keep, and say to myself, 'This was Cecily's' ?"

"Nothing," she replied.

"And must we part thus ?" he asked.

"Yes, thus," she said ; "and so farewell."

"Farewell," he said ; "but not for ever, Cecily."

CHAPTER VII.

A NOBLE KNIGHT.



NOT many months after Edmund's departure for Oxford, the quiet of the manor-house was broken early one morning by the clatter of horses' hoofs, and the winding of a horn under the windows.

Such unusual sounds caused Evelyn and Cecily to run to the casements looking on the pavement below. There they beheld, to their astonishment, a band of men in apparel that once had been gay, but was now soiled and travel-stained. The armorial bearings of him who evidently was their leader were repeated both in their own liveries and on the trappings of their horses. They had certainly ridden hard that night. The noble chargers that bore them were flecked with foam, and the men appeared spent and weary ; all but their leader, to whom endurance was evidently familiar. His golden spurs attested his knighthood ; and his erect bearing and hasty glance, as he waited for an answer to his summons, betokened the presence of one to whom command was habitual. And yet the draggled plume that flowed over his morion, and splashes reaching to his very head, told that he had shared the fatigues of his followers.

"A goodly gentleman," said Evelyn. "Surely he must be from the court itself."

"Look at the device on his helmet!" said Cecily; "what can it be?"

"I think it must be an eagle, the king of birds," Evelyn replied.

"To me it appears more like a vulture preparing to swoop," Cecily remarked.

"See, they approach! I can almost read the motto. Yes, 'I follow on;' that is it, I think."

"Then it must be a vulture," said Cecily. "Royal birds do not follow, but lead."

"I suppose all birds follow their prey," said Evelyn impatiently. "But look," she continued with delight, "there is my father; and he with the sable plume has bent till the feathers have mingled with the charger's mane. How courtly he is in his movements. And the men have dismounted, and the esquire is at the black charger's head; and here come Geoffrey and Robert, and now they are leading their horses away. And see!" she exclaimed, clapping her hands, "the knight has thrown his bridle rein to the esquire, and he is entering the hall with my father. O Cécily, is it not delightful?"

"He looks like some errant knight bent on noble deeds," Cecily replied.

"I should say that he has achieved a good many already," said Evelyn. "How bravely he bears his knighthood! And in what high honour his followers hold him!"

"How can you tell that already?" Cecily asked.

"Oh, by their manner. It was not rough and forward, like our country-bred men."

"That may be only outside and barren deference," said Cecily. "I have heard that at court men treat those with especial honour one day whom they will defame and slay the

next. When your father or Hugh lead forth their followers, they may be rough and free-spoken, as you say, but any man among them would gladly die for his lord."

"I wonder what fair lady at court honours this gentleman with her favour," said Evelyn, without heeding Cecily's remark.

But a summons from Dame Vivian speedily put an end to the speculations of the two girls, and they were soon assisting to spread the ample table in the hall with such substantial fare as was suitable to the appetites of men who had been wanderers through the night.

Whilst thus employed, the squire entered the room accompanied by the stranger, whom he presented to the ladies as "Sir Ralph Oldcastle."

"Two fair daughters of the house, I presume," said he, as he advanced to kiss their hands. "A lily and a rose blooming side by side in this strange solitude."

Evelyn's cheeks suffused at the unaccustomed language of compliment, and increased the appropriateness of the simile so much that even her father could not avoid being struck by it, as well as by his little daughter's growing beauty.

"Pardon, sir knight," he replied. "They are both but simple country maidens, unaccustomed to the usage of courts and courtiers. One, indeed, is my own flesh and blood, and the other scarcely less my daughter by adoption."

"Ah, indeed," said Sir Ralph, as his eyes wandered from the one to the other in pleased astonishment, calling up fresh blushes to Evelyn's glowing cheeks, and causing a slight increase of dignity in Cecily's naturally graceful deportment. "It is hard to believe that such fair flowers can have grown up in this wilderness without being fostered by the hand of art as well as that of nature."

And then, as he seemed to gather from the squire's manner that his attentions to the two young damsels gave him but little pleasure, he turned to the meal which the hospitality usual at the manor had provided, and to which he did ample justice. Towards its close he said to the squire,—

“I would crave one favour in addition to those you have already shown me. Can you direct me the road to the Manor of St. Bridget, formerly the residence of a community of religious persons?”

Sir Ralph spoke with some hesitation, as if doubting how such inquiry would be received. But the squire's manner underwent no change as he answered simply,—

“Truly I could direct you the road ; but whether you would find it after such direction, is another matter. For many miles it is nothing but a track over the open downs, and the landmarks that point out the way would scarcely be discerned by a stranger.”

“A bleak, inhospitable country this is of yours !” exclaimed Sir Ralph. “Sea and sky, and sky and sea,—this is all that meets the eye ; and not a tree to give shelter, except in ravines steep enough to break the knees of any beast carrying a man heavily armed. Surely my lord the king might have found some guerdon more worthy of his faithful follower, than so many acres of bare rock with scarce herbage enough to feed his cattle !”

“I am not mistaken, then, in supposing that you are the noble gentleman to whom the broad lands of St. Bridget's were assigned when the community at Pendower was dissolved?” said the squire.

“I indeed am that unfortunate person,” replied Sir Ralph.

“Why ‘unfortunate,’ if I may make bold to ask ?” inquired the squire.

“That were a long story, and it would tire your patience should I tell the whole,” said Sir Ralph. However, as he perceived that Evelyn’s eyes were bent upon him with eager sympathy, and Cecily’s with something of surprised wonder and anger, he added, after a pause,—“Nevertheless, as we shall henceforth be neighbours, and, as I hope, friends, I may as briefly as possible answer your question. First, then, I am a soldier of fortune : my family lost their patrimony in the wars of the Roses, and I am the last of the race. The camp has ever been my home, and from early childhood I have scarcely known another. Abroad and at home, my sword has been my king’s. I received knighthood at the hand of his grace of Norfolk ; and scarcely more than two years since I came to court to stay awhile with his Majesty, and to be cured of the sore wounds I had received in a border foray. Many were the barren honours that were heaped on me, but none could give me back the strength of my sword arm, which had been broken in the fray. At last his Majesty, seeing I was but useless lumber, and wishing to bestow me somewhere, sent for me one day and gave me a deed of gift of the Abbey lands of Pendower, and bid me take men and horses, and ride to tame the Cornish churls and train them into faithful lieges. For awhile I lingered about court, for in truth I had been better pleased had his grace given me a pension and a place about his royal person, which I thought my due ; but as time went on I saw that money was scarce in the royal coffers, and that what there was, had to be laid out in the great armaments and defences the king was for ever making. And then when his grace married the kinswoman of the Duke of Norfolk, the fair Howard, I saw it was the part of wisdom to take what I had and begone ; for some said that the king’s mind was ever towards the queen and

her family, and that before long we should have the monks and nuns claiming their own again."

"And is it your belief that this will be?" asked the squire.

"No, by my troth," said the knight; "and this because his Majesty has found better uses for the riches that once were theirs—as, for example, his gift to my own poor self; and there are many others in like circumstances."

The squire sighed, while two red spots burned on Cecily's usually pale face, and Evelyn looked from the one to the other in puzzled amazement.

"I hope my plain speaking does not offend you!" said Sir Ralph; "but the times are hard, and one must take what one can get."

"You have given me no cause of offence," said the squire; "and as for those that come after us, to my mind they are well rid of monks and nuns. No, we must look forward and not backward. I did but sigh as I thought of the easy times the poor of St. Bridget's had under the good sisters who have gone from thence. The Lady Abbess was a kinswoman of my wife, and as gentle a lady as ever breathed; every poor soul on the estate was like a child of hers. Pardon me if I thought the shepherding they would meet with, from a warrior like yourself, they might find somewhat of the roughest after such a mother as they have lost!"

"'Tis like enough," said Sir Ralph; "seeing, too, that I have no good dame to bring to the head of my house, and none of the ladies of the court would ever bury themselves in such an outlandish and heathenish place."

Sir Ralph spoke with some bitterness; and the squire broke in with warmth.—

“Wait awhile, man—wait awhile. When you know it better, you will say this is a pleasant country to live in. Here we breathe health from the broad ocean that almost surrounds us. Here the heats of summer never parch, and the cold of winter does not pinch. Here flowers bloom in abundance; and if you love sport, you can have it to your heart’s content, for the rivers are full of fish, and the moors and copses of game. Leave the court popinjays to their own devices, and enjoy the good that Heaven has sent you; and maybe among the ladies of King Arthur’s own land you may find one that shall excel even those great ladies of whom you speak!”

“Verily, if King Arthur’s court was brightened with such fair ornaments as I see before me here,” said Sir Ralph, “I cannot but confess that King Arthur was better off than King Henry. Sooth to say, I am almost weary of the quips and pastimes that our court ladies practise. Unless a man can converse in half-a-dozen languages, they think nothing of him; and if he ventures on a love-letter in his own mother tongue, ten to one an answer comes back in Latin!”

“I have heard somewhat of this,” replied the squire. “The king’s grace himself is a marvel of learning; and doubtless the noble ladies he honours with his favour must be expert in all manner of book-lore to make him good company.”

“It may be so,” said the knight. “It is certain that the royal ladies, his daughters, are bred up more like learned doctors than women—whose powers, some say, are less than those of men. For my part, I never was fashioned in my youth to be so great a student, and I am well content to leave book-learning to priests and women if they are so minded. The Lady Mary’s grace, they say, could take a high degree at either university, whether in mathematics or the science of the stars, in the

learned languages or in modern parlances. She excels also in music and needlework, and all womanly arts."

The squire looked at Evelyn with a smile, as she blushed at this recital of the young princess's acquirements. Sir Ralph noticed the look that passed between father and daughter, and also the displeased and offended demeanour that Cecily maintained; and as he rose to take his leave, he ventured on a petition that both Rose and Lily, as it pleased him to call them, would honour him with a visit when his poor abode was somewhat brought into order.

Evelyn looked imploringly at her father with pleased surprise, saying she would gladly do so, with her father's permission; and she did not refuse her hand to Sir Ralph in friendly fashion. Cecily, on the contrary, made no response, but allowed the knight to depart, only making him a courtesy of the most formal description.

He had scarcely left the room, in company with the squire, when Evelyn threw her arms round Cecily's neck, saying,—

"Is he not delightful? Is he not a real courtier? Rose and Lily, he calls us. How curious that he should have hit upon your old convent name! But what's the matter, Cecily? You do not seem half pleased, and yet I am sure he admires you greatly."

"I should hope not," said Cecily. "I should think it almost an insult to be admired by such a smooth-tongued freebooter as he!"

"Smooth-tongued freebooter! What can you mean? He is the most noble and most well-spoken gentleman I have met in my life! Oh, I know what you mean!" said Evelyn, suddenly breaking out into a sunny laugh. "It is all your old nonsense about being a nun; and you are angry because this gentleman

presumed to look at you! Certainly he does give one a wonderful look—his eyes seem to go through one.”

“He is a bold, bad man, take my word for it,” said Cecily. “He is no better than a highway robber. What is he coming here for but to plunder the Church?”

“Nonsense,” said Evelyn. “He does but take what is given him. Depend upon it, by the time he has routed out that old rabbit-warren where we were shut up, and brought a noble lady to preside over his household, the people round will be better off with the good times he will bring with him, than with those old mumbling fathers and antiquated sisters.”

“I doubt it,” said Cecily. “And if they were, it does not lessen the sacrilege. Surely those lands and the tenantry upon them will never be rightfully his. They were given to God,—some by my ancestors of pious memory,—and they cannot be taken away. If this man has them, they will cling round his neck as a stone to drown him!”

“Sweet sister, do not speak so unkindly of my poor knight,” said Evelyn playfully, “or I shall be obliged to do battle in his behalf. He has but received what his master the king has seen fit to give. Why should we trouble ourselves to find fault with the decrees of fate? The king and the parliament must know what is best for the people. Let us take the good that Heaven sends us, and be thankful. And surely it must be a good that so noble a gentleman is come to live in our midst; and one whom the king has honoured may well find favour with two poor country-bred maidens.”

It was not often that Cecily alluded to her own family and lineage, but upon this occasion, with kindling eyes, she said,—

“Country-bred I may be, and yet the blood that flows in my veins is that of ancestors who would never have disgraced them-

selves by accepting the spoils of their Mother the Church as a recompense for their duty done to an earthly sovereign. No; they fought for glory and their liege lord, and asked no guerdon but what they had in their noble deeds and unsullied name. They rather bestowed their earthly goods on Heaven, and left to me, their child, a heritage of poverty, which I accept as my chiefest honour, taking it as a pledge of their piety and devotion. Never will I be unworthy of them by regarding as my friend a robber-knight who—”

Here the conversation was interrupted by the entrance of the squire and Hugh, who, in their way, were also canvassing the merits of their late guest.

“He is doubtless a brave soldier,” the squire was saying as he entered. “I had heard his name many times; and report had assigned to him the gift of the Manor of St. Bridget some months since.”

“I know not how such a courtly knight will condescend to the plain ways of the country-folk,” said Hugh; “and I question whether the honour of having him for their lord will make up in their eyes for not having been nurtured amongst them.” Then catching Cecily’s flashing eyes, and noting her excited appearance, he asked, “But what says Miss Tremaine? Is she prepared to welcome with her favour the noble gentleman whom fortune has sent us for a neighbour?”

“Oh no, no!” burst in Evelyn. “She has been calling him a robber, and accusing him of sacrilege, and all sorts of evil. Do speak to her, Hugh, and tell her he is no such thing.”

But Hugh only smiled, and evinced no displeasure at Evelyn’s open declaration of her friend’s opinions. Only the squire said, —“In these days, what was once wrong is now right, and right is wrong,—at least, in the eyes of our law and of our rulers.

The king, our master, must be sore put to it to govern this realm of England. What with deceitful allies abroad, and unruly subjects at home, the times must be hard for him to weather. If he deems that our Mother the Church has failed to hold out to him a helping hand in his necessity, who shall blame him if he somewhat roughly has despoiled her of a part of her temporal pomp and power, and has thus wherewithal to reward those who have stood by him in the evil day !”

Before he had finished speaking, Cecily had left the hall, for she could bear no more. She fled to her room, and casting herself on her knees before a little image of St. Bridget which she had carried with her from the convent, she commenced an intercessory devotion, praying the saint to interfere and avenge the insult that was being offered to her memory by evil men.

From that day a slight estrangement took place between Cecily and Evelyn. There was one subject which was avoided by mutual consent, and that was the sayings and doings of their new neighbour, Sir Ralph Oldcastle. And yet this was more and more the uppermost subject in Evelyn’s thoughts, as well as the constant topic of conversation in the family.

The whole country-side soon rang with the news of the alterations he was making in the old convent. How the refectory was turned into a banqueting-hall, and the sleeping-cells of the nuns were thrown into suites of apartments, with workshops and armouries. Changes within and without were going on apace ; but in all that he did Sir Ralph was constant in his attendance at Vivian Hall, consulting Dame Vivian and seeking her advice with marked deference. For some time the good lady’s politeness could hardly enable her to enter upon the subject of “improvements,” which at first sight were to her little less than desecration. Sir Ralph’s courtesy, however, in due time won

the day, and she was even heard to say that, since the nunnery had to be done away, she for her part was right glad that so noble and honourable a gentleman should be placed in possession of the domain.

Thus secure of the good-will of two ladies of the family, Sir Ralph's visits became more and more frequent. The squire and Hugh were less demonstrative in their welcome than Dame Vivian, but treated him with the consideration due to his rank and the honour bestowed upon him by the king. Cecily only stood aloof, and was persistent in her coldness when she chanced to be in his company. This, however, was but seldom, as she generally contrived to be occupied in her own apartment, or visiting the poor amongst the squire's tenants, when she was aware that he was on a visit at the Hall.

One evening, when she had been thus absent the greater part of the day, and was hastening back as the sun was setting, she encountered Hugh, who was returning from a day's sport.

As soon as he saw her he jumped off his horse, and throwing the bridle over his arm, began as was his wont to talk of the foreign war which every one now believed to be ready to blaze out, and in connection with this of his own prospect of joining the king's forces. Suddenly changing the topic, and looking inquiringly at Cecily, he said,—

"Shall you not find it lonely here when we are all gone—I mean, if my father allows Dick and Tom to accompany me?"

"I do not know," said Cecily. "Of course we shall all miss you and the boys; but then I shall still have your father and mother, and Evelyn."

"Yes, there is my little sister left," said Hugh; "but it seems to me that now-a-days she is more taken up with the stranger

knight than with any of us, or even than with her chosen friend."

Cecily sighed, and tears almost forced themselves to her eyes.

"It is perhaps a question that *I* have no right to ask," Hugh continued, "but as I perceive that this gay courtier and noble warrior has found no favour in your eyes, I would know for another's sake whether one pang of regret ever crosses your mind for a decision you once came to?"

Cecily looked at him inquiringly.

"I mean with regard to my brother Edmund. Would you, Cecily, if you could, speak a word that would recall him to your side?"

Cecily flushed crimson. "I knew not," she replied, "that you too were in league against me. But I have but one answer to all such suggestions, and that is 'No.'"

"I must have been mistaken then," said Hugh, "and I beg your pardon; but I have fancied that since my brother went away you have not been quite what you were before. I thought that perhaps from some high motive you might have been doing violence to your own feelings, and I wished to know what perhaps I had no right to ask, and for my brother's sake—"

Here Hugh stopped and hesitated; but Cecily by this time had recovered herself, and said,—

"Forgive me my hastiness of speech, for I know you spoke in kindness. I am indeed sick at heart, but it is for the cause of our Holy Church. I seem to see one after another falling away from her, and her very children rejoice in her plunder. Is it to be wondered at if sometimes my faith grows dim, and my orisons are made in tears? Alas for our country and the few faithful ones! Has not the glory of England departed?"

"I trust not," said Hugh. "Ere long you shall hear of England's triumphs over her ancient foes, and one at least will be proud to lay his laurels at your feet."

So saying, Hugh went his way, and Cecily entered the house perplexed and sad.

CHAPTER VIII.

MARRIAGE BELLS.



LONG as the great war had been expected by all the youth of England, who were burning to emulate their forefathers in winning for themselves a name in the king's army, it was not until 1543 that an alliance was proclaimed between England and Spain; and simultaneously with that, war between the allies and France.

It is true that in the meantime the warriors of England had not allowed their swords to rust, as the constant strife with Scotland had caused perpetual bloodshed and forays on the Border. But now James V. was dead, and intrigue took the place of warfare for a time.

The appeal for new levies to fight against France ran through England like an electric shock, and Hugh and his brothers were now up and doing, and the ferment and excitement spread far and wide.

At Vivian Hall there were other conflicting feelings aroused in the minds of many of its inmates. It was now more than a year since Sir Ralph Oldcastle had taken possession of his estates; and on the first rumours of the war being at hand, he too had begun to furbish his armour and discipline his tenants, as if the fighting fever were infectious; and despite his wounded

arm, his ambition to be in the fight was also apparent. His intimacy with the members of the squire's family had not relaxed, and scarcely a week had elapsed without some courtesy being exchanged between himself and them.

It was therefore no matter of surprise when one morning one of his men-at-arms arrived early bearing a packet, addressed to the squire, and bound with a silken thread of azure blue.

Squire Vivian was alone in his armoury when the letter arrived. He opened it with some curiosity, as all his previous intercourse with the knight had taken place before this time by means of messages transmitted through a favourite page by word of mouth, Sir Ralph evidently being no man of letters. The writing was in bold characters, which had been formed slowly and with care, and ran thus :—

“MOST HONOURABLE SIR, I heartily commend me to you, and crave your favourable consideration of the matter I have in hand. Having for some time past had divers opportunities of becoming acquainted with the great and various excellences of your daughter Evelyn, I desire to offer myself to you as a fitting suitor for her hand. I come, sir, of as ancient a stock as yourself; and for her provision and maintenance in the chance of my death, I am willing to settle upon her the whole of the Manor of Pendower, lately conveyed to me by my lord the king. Should this my suit find acceptance with you, I would further desire that you should send me some token of the same, that my betrothal with your fair daughter may take place with all convenient despatch.—Yours, with love and courtesy,

“RALPH OLDCASTLE, KNIGHT.

“*Written at the Manor-House of Pendower,
the 7th day of April 1543.*”

This composition had evidently cost the writer some pains ; but the matter it contained was no little cause of trouble to the squire. He turned it over and over, and read it and re-read it. The notion of having his little daughter betrothed, and, as it were, carried off from him "with all convenient despatch," was certainly most unpalatable to him. At last, with something between a groan and a sigh, he betook himself to Dame Vivian's morning-room, where he found her alone.

"See what has come of all your philandering and friend-making of that ungrateful knave!" said he, displaying the document before her astonished eyes.

"What ungrateful knave? and what have I done?" said the poor woman.

"Why, he who calls himself Sir Ralph Oldcastle. Who else should I mean?"

"Indeed, I do not know," said the dame, still more puzzled. "What can he have done to vex you in this fashion?"

"Done! why, everything that could most annoy me! He wants to steal our dearest possession—our jewel—our gem."

"Steal!" said Dame Vivian, still more bewildered; "and such a noble gentleman! But who told you so?"

"Who? why, he himself. Can you read, woman?" said he, throwing the letter down before her.

"There! you startle me so. I can scarce hold the paper. Read it yourself," she replied.

"Read it!" said the squire, still sputtering and angry. "But no; I'll tell you in two words what it's all about. He wants our Evelyn, our child! Do you understand now?"

"Oh!" said Dame Vivian, drawing a long breath, "that's it, is it?"

"That's it indeed; and enough too, I should think. I de-

clare if the archangel Michael were to come down from heaven on a golden ladder and ask for her, he should not have her."

"But, husband," said Dame Vivian, who meanwhile had been perusing the letter with curious eyes, "I cannot see that we should do well or wisely in refusing our daughter to so well-spoken a gentleman."

"Well or wisely! Evelyn is but a child. Why should we give her away to the first suitor that asks for her?"

"Evelyn is not such a child as you think; she is now nineteen years of age. And should we refuse this gentleman, I know not where we should look for a more befitting suitor," Dame Vivian replied.

"Why should we look at all?" asked the squire. "Why not keep our child with us? Who can love her as we do?"

"Husband!" said Dame Vivian, mournfully, "these are troublous times, as I have often heard you say, and methinks our child may be better off with one who has a strong arm, and can hold his own, than with elderly folk like ourselves, on whom the shadow of years is beginning to fall."

The squire sighed, then said, almost to himself, "A strong arm? Yes, but is it a righteous one? What do we know of this stranger knight, except that he is wealthy and noble?"

Here the dame, seeing that her husband was inclined to waver, struck in afresh: "But *I* know him well, for he has taken counsel with me on many matters, and I have somewhat marked his partiality for our child; and, indeed, one might have guessed it, if one did not see. Why otherwise should he so constantly have honoured our house with his presence? Could you be so blind as to think he came for nothing but to talk of battles with you, or to hunt and hawk with Hugh?"

"Then you have known it all along, and said nothing to me?" said the squire with an injured air.

"Known it, man! no; for there was nothing to know! But I may have had my thoughts; and how could I tell but that you had yours!"

"Fool that I was!" said the squire. "But it is not too late to undo the mischief. The child herself surely would not wish to leave the home nest so soon. Shall we put it to her; and according to the way she takes it, this gentleman shall have his answer?"

"That is well thought of," answered Dame Vivian. "You had better send for Evelyn; and as she takes it, so let it be."

Evelyn was accordingly summoned, and her voice was heard singing down the passage, till she reached the room where her parents were sitting. She gazed with some astonishment on her mother's flushed cheeks and her father's troubled countenance; and as the squire took both her hands and gazed into her eyes, she trembled at the solemnity of his manner.

"Evelyn," said he, in a grave and earnest manner, "your mother says you are no more a child, and this reminds me that I must be getting an old man. I have ever sought your happiness, and trust I shall do so now in a matter I am called on to decide. But to enable me to do this, I must have your answer to one or two questions."

Evelyn stood with her eyes fixed upon the squire, with almost an awestruck expression in them, and she answered in a whisper, "Yes, father."

"Well, first, I would know what you think of our neighbour, Sir Ralph Oldcastle."

Evelyn drew a long breath, and answered readily, "Think of

him, father ! why, as any lady must think of any noble gentleman who has shown her unfailing courtesy !”

“ And how is that ? ”

“ As one to be very highly honoured and esteemed.”

“ Nothing more ? ”

“ What more should there be, my father ? ”

“ Do you think that he is such an one as a lady could honour and esteem, ay, and love too, beyond all others ? ”

“ I should never doubt it.”

“ Yet one more question ; and answer not hastily, for much depends on what that answer is ! Could you, my Evelyn, be that lady ? ”

“ I, father ! ” And Evelyn for the first time dropped her eyes and blushed, murmuring, “ But he has not asked me ? ”

Then the squire trembled in his turn, and taking Sir Ralph Oldcastle’s letter from his wife, spread it open before Evelyn, saying, “ Read that.”

Evelyn read the whole, and her breath came short and fast, and she stood before her parents in silence, instead of breaking out into protestations that she would never leave them, as the squire had more than hoped she would do.

“ How is it to be ? Speak, Evelyn,” said her father hoarsely.

“ As you and my mother will,” said Evelyn, in low tones.

“ Then, am I to understand that you yourself are willing to forsake your home, and follow this stranger, whom some few months ago you had never seen ? ”

Poor Evelyn burst into tears, and Dame Vivian broke in,—

“ You are pressing her too close, my husband. Do not forget that there was a time when you were equally urgent that I should leave my father’s hearth and follow you ! We have had our day, and the child must have hers.”

"I had thought," said the squire mournfully, "that when the boys went out into the world, our little Evelyn would have been the one to stay in our chimney-corner, and be the bright star of our home."

"O father, dear father, and so I will," said Evelyn, sobbing; "there is no one in the world like you. I do not want to go; indeed, I do not."

The squire brushed a tear from his eye and walked to the window, and there was silence in the room for a time, only broken by Evelyn's sobs. At last, coming back, he kissed her, and said,—“Perhaps, after all, your mother is right, my Evelyn: it were a selfish love that would stand between you and a noble protector; and he speaks fairly, too! Hugh is going, and Tom, and Dick; and who can tell what the chances of war may be? and Edmund is just the fellow to run his neck into a rope; and where would my little daughter be if all her brothers were gone?”

"These are my very thoughts," said Dame Vivian. "Now, if we give our child to this good gentleman, we shall at least keep her near us, his estates being close at hand, as we may say."

Evelyn smiled through her tears; but the squire looked grave, and said, "Once given, she is ours no longer, wife. Look at it well before the troth is plighted. She will be his, not ours."

"Not so," said Dame Vivian. "Both will be ours: we shall gain a son, and not lose a daughter."

Evelyn looked from one parent to the other as this discussion proceeded, her eye brightening at her mother's replies, until the squire, turning to her, said,—

"The time is passing, and the messenger waits. Go to your

room, my daughter, and take counsel with yourself in this matter. If your heart goes forth to meet this honourable gentleman with love and wifely duty, return here in half an hour ; and doubt not that in giving you to him your father's blessing shall go with you. But if for any cause you love him not, and feel you cannot render to him that honour and obedience that will be his due when you become his wife, then speak the word, and your own old home shall keep you as long as your old father has one to share with you, or until another suitor should come who is more to your mind."

Her father's words awoke more serious thoughts in Evelyn's mind than were frequent visitors there. Did she think she could honour and obey him ? The answer to this question was unhesitating. How could she, who felt so greatly flattered by his preference, do otherwise than honour him ? As to obedience, there was that in the flash of his falcon eye which made her feel that no one belonging to him could do otherwise than obey ; and, moreover, that she would be proud to own him for her master, before whom so many trembled.

But then there was love—that was a more difficult question. Certainly she felt pleasure in his society ; but it was a pleasure not unmixed with fear. For no one else beyond her own family had she ever felt such profound admiration ; but then, she had seen very few people with whom to compare him. Cecily did not like him ; and she remembered thinking, at a time when the knight's attentions had been equally bestowed on the two girls, that she was glad when Cecily's coldness threw him more into her own society ; and that she would not have been quite pleased to see her friend preferred to herself. This, no doubt, was jealousy ; and jealousy, she had been told, was a proof of love. She supposed, then, she must love him.

At all events, the thought of giving up all the pleasant intercourse which had thrown such a bright colouring over the last few months was a painful one ; and Evelyn felt that a new and keener zest was imparted to life since Sir Ralph Oldcastle had come into the foreground, and played such a conspicuous part in the drama of her life.

She did not see that becoming his wife would of necessity estrange her from her parents ; in this she thought her mother was more right than her father ; and she began to picture to herself long visits which they would pay at the Manor-House of St. Bridget, and of the gay rides she would have to see them at Vivian Hall, attended ever by her devoted lover, Sir Ralph : in the midst of which day-dreams her mother's voice recalled her to present realities, informing her that her father was waiting for her below-stairs. Many words were not needed to tell the bent of her own inclinations ; and before sundown that day the horseman rode back to St. Bridget's the bearer of a carefully penned document, which was to convey to Sir Ralph Oldcastle the happy intelligence that he was free to come and prosecute his suit.

And now he became a constant visitor at the Hall ; and Evelyn's betrothal having taken place with all the formality that the circumstances admitted of, Sir Ralph became urgent that their marriage might follow immediately, urging as a plea his desire that Hugh and his brothers should be present at his bridal festivities before setting off for the camp.

Thus it happened that, on a bright midsummer morning, scarcely two months from her betrothal, Evelyn Vivian became Lady Oldcastle. She was married by the priest of St. Edel's with all the pomp and circumstance befitting the bride of a gentleman of high birth and a member of the ancient Church.

Then she returned with her husband to those scenes of her girlhood which, only four years before, she had left under very different circumstances.

Cecily so far overcame her feelings of dislike to her friend's husband as to attend upon her through the long ceremonial of their wedding-day ; but when Evelyn kissed her in taking leave, and said, " Now, Cecily, you must be my first guest in my new home," her lip quivered, and she turned away. She only said, however,—“Your father and mother will be lonesome now, when you are gone, and Hugh and all ; it were better for me to stay with them, and be of what help I may.”

Evelyn pressed her hand, and said,—“Dear Cecily, you were always my good angel ! How could I have left them if you had not been here ?”

Gaily the horses pranced that bore the young bride and the gay cavalcade that attended her from the ancestral home of Vivian Hall. Evelyn's golden locks glittered in the sunlight, as she rode forth on a milk-white palfrey with Sir Ralph at her bridle rein. Before she reached the last turn in the road whence the old house could be seen, she gave one lingering look behind, and discovered her father standing at the threshold shading his eyes with his hand. She waved her handkerchief, and two bright tear-drops fell as she saw him turn away, and, drawing her mother's arm within his own, pass out of sight.

“Cheer up, my bright one,” said the voice of Sir Ralph by her side ; and giving the spur to his horse, and laying his hand on Evelyn's bridle, the black charger and the white palfrey were soon speeding with their riders across the heath-clad downs.

In the long twilight of that summer's evening, Cecily sat by herself in the deep embrasure of the oriel window. As her

thoughts wandered sadly over the events of the last two years, she became aware that she was not alone, and soon perceived that it was Hugh who was standing at her side. He held in his hand a silken knot, and a bunch of faded flowers which had been fresh that morning, when she had worn them as bridesmaid at Evelyn's wedding.

"They were yours once, but give them to me as a parting gift," said Hugh. "I will engage that this blue ribbon shall be seen in the hottest of the battle."

"Why parting?" said Cecily. "Surely you do not leave us yet?"

"Yes, fair Cecily. The time is near. My brother-in-law has done me good offices with my lord king, and he has given me a command which will take me forth to the camp the next day but one. It is but short notice, but a soldier must not tarry when his orders come."

"And Dick and Tom?" asked Cecily.

"Yes; they will make their first essay in arms under my leadership; and I doubt not but they will bear themselves bravely, as their forefathers did. But you have not answered my request, Cecily."

"Your request! What was it? Oh, concerning the ribbon! Nay, it is not mine to give. It is your sister Evelyn's, who, I doubt not, would willingly bestow it upon you."

"But it was yours to-day. I saw you with it."

"For just a few hours; and to please Evelyn on her wedding-day, I suffered her to trick me out with the vanities I have forsworn. But, Hugh, *you* know well such things are not for me."

"Strange maiden that you are!" said Hugh, almost to himself. "Why is it that you have thus the power of casting a

magic spell on all who approach you, while you remain unscathed yourself? It is well for me that the time is near to break the enchantment by the din of battle."

As he spoke, a tall figure passed outside the casement where they were holding this converse, and, hearing their voices, stopped, and in well-known accents said,—

"Is there admittance and a night's lodging for a travel-worn stranger?"

"Stranger! no stranger you, unless my ears deceive me," said Hugh. Hastily approaching the door and opening it, he drew in the traveller; and after greeting him warmly, he led him to the oriel where Cecily was sitting; who, looking up in amazement, discovered, under the accoutrements of the man of war before her the outlines of the well-remembered features of Master Theodore.

His abrupt disappearance on the occasion of his former visit, and his apparent coldness in then departing without any leave taken of herself, rose to her memory, and occasioned some confusion of manner in her reception of him.

It was too dark for him to observe her countenance, but the change in her manner was not unnoticed by Theodore, who, also perceiving the bunch of flowers and silken knot which Hugh had retained in his possession, came to the conclusion that his unexpected appearance at that late hour had disturbed a conference between the two which might make him an unwelcome guest.

"Pardon me, good friends," he said, "for thus intruding at such a late hour; but being in England for a brief space, a strange longing possessed me to look yet once again on these familiar scenes, and on the friends of happy memory."

"No pardon is needed," said Hugh. "No guest could be

more welcome to my father at this time than yourself ; for shortly every one of his family will have left him. My mother will have Cecily, but he will be alone. Therefore stay a while, I entreat you, if but for a few days after my departure."

"I know not how that may be," said Master Theodore ; "yet I would adventure much, if by so doing I could pleasure your good father. But more of this hereafter. Tell me now of your own welfare, and your sister's, whose bridal, I hear, I have arrived just too late to witness."

Thus challenged, they talked till darkness fell upon them ; and Cecily learned that Theodore had been far away in foreign lands, where Edmund had joined him ; but that the tumult caused by the impending war had made the place of his sojourn unsafe for an English subject, and that he had come to England to see for himself how the case stood between the two great parties that divided public opinion ; while Edmund had sought freedom and shelter in one of the obscure German states which were friendly to the Reformation.

Hugh pressed upon his friend that he should take arms and join the company of which he had the command, until the advent of more peaceful times abroad and at home. But Theodore declined, saying that the military dress he wore was but for purposes of travel ; and he added,— "There is a work before me, but the warfare must be spiritual, not of this world. I have a witness within me that I am separated for the work ; but I wait to take up my weapons till I have received that outward token of consecration, without which even apostles ventured not out to the fight. Some day this too may be granted me ; till then I labour as I may, and wait."

CHAPTER IX.

DOUBTS AND DIFFICULTIES.

HE departure of Hugh and his brothers for the war, with their stout band of Cornish followers, had scarcely taken place, when the news travelled down to the far west that the king was about to take to himself a sixth queen,—the pious and learned Lady Latimer.

Master Theodore had lingered on at the Hall, in consequence of the squire's earnest entreaties, and assurance that he would hold himself responsible for his personal safety; and it was through him that this intelligence first reached the Hall. A messenger, in the disguise of a pedlar, brought him one day a large budget of letters and papers, in which this event was announced.

"And what, think you, will be the upshot of this marriage?" asked the squire.

"Truly, it may be the dawning of a better day for England," Master Theodore replied, "if the new queen is well beloved of the king; for she is a lady of singular learning, and one who, in her widowhood, has entertained the great lights of the present time. But the enemy is crafty and strong, and even my lord king has much ado to hold his own."

"She had need be a brave woman," said Dame Vivian. "It

seems but yesterday the bells were ringing for the late queen's marrying! Poor thing, she had but a short day of it! His majesty must be getting into years; and his temper, they say, is none of the best!"

This colloquy took place one day before the reduced party at the Hall had separated after partaking of an early breakfast together.

The smell of the newly mown grass was borne in at the open doors and casements by the gentle breeze, and the squire soon went out amongst the mowers; while Dame Vivian having many household cares to engage her attention, it so happened that Cecily was left alone in the hall with Theodore as her only companion.

"Miss Tremaine," said he, "pardon my curiosity, but some writing I found in the library yesterday has filled me with a desire to ask something of you when I had the opportunity of doing so."

"What can it be?" said Cecily.

"It is this," said he, drawing from his pocket a manuscript in neatly-formed Greek characters.

Cecily coloured as she recognized her own writing.

"Ah!" she said, "that can have little interest to so great a student as yourself."

"Indeed, you are greatly mistaken," said he with earnestness, "if it is, as I believe, your own handwriting. That you should have attained so fair a knowledge of that language which I look upon as the key to the most precious of all learning, is to me a matter of the deepest interest."

"It is very good of you to speak thus," said Cecily. "I have indeed found this study full of interest to myself, although I first took it up because—because," and she

hesitated, something withheld her from mentioning Edmund's name.

But Theodore came to her assistance, and finished her sentence with—"Because it was Edmund's wish."

"Scarcely so," said Cecily. "I think the idea began with myself, when I thought the occupation of teaching so ignorant a person as myself might distract his thoughts from grieving at your departure."

A peculiar smile passed over Theodore's features as he said,—

"And so this work of charity brought its own reward?"

"I can scarcely say so," said Cecily; "for it brought much trouble also. Perhaps *you* can understand how painful it is to be misunderstood."

"I think I can," said Theodore, in a tone of deep feeling.

"I have heard you speak," said Cecily, "of a vocation you have yourself to follow; and you know what is mine. You can therefore understand better than others what the pain must be of having the purpose of one's life overlooked, and treated as if it could be lightly taken up, and as lightly cast aside."

"It is wounding to one's earthly nature, certainly," Theodore replied; "but if it is only one's *own* purpose that is overthrown, may it not be that He who directs the events of our lives had another purpose for us, higher and better than the one we conceived for ourselves?"

Cecily was silent for a moment, then she said,—

"But the purpose of which I speak,—that of devoting my life to religion,—is confessedly the highest and best that can be attained upon earth, and cannot, therefore, be compared with the aims and purposes that are worldly."

"Have you ever read," said Theodore, "of one who had a purpose of his own, which he conceived of as the greatest and

highest, even the establishment of his National Church upon earth ; and how an especial revelation from heaven was granted him, by the light of which he saw how great his error had been ; and how after that, in obedience and humility, following the guidance of the Holy Spirit of God, and not his own will, he became the light of the whole Gentile world ? I speak of the Apostle Paul."

"No," said Cecily ; "I never read that. Some legends of his childhood I have heard in the convent where I was educated, and Sister Maria told me she had seen the sword with which he was beheaded, by means of which wonderful miracles were still wrought ; but what you have now told me I never heard. It is very interesting."

"It may well be so to us," said Theodore ; "for, humanly speaking, we, the Gentile Church, are the result of that change of life and vocation which took place in him. But surely, when obstacles are placed in the way that we would choose for ourselves, it is a comfort to think that He who directs small things as well as great may be preparing another path for us to walk in. I know not how *we* can say which is 'highest and best.' He who alone knows all things truly, knows this, and has nowhere said that one state on earth is more holy than another. Surely our aim should be to glorify Him in our life and in our death. Can we have a higher?"

"Certainly not," said Cecily ; "but the entrance to this, the highest, must be through the religious life. All the martyrs and confessors whose lives are recorded, have thus entered upon it."

"If by the 'religious life' you mean seclusion in a hermitage or a convent, I cannot agree to your statement. The saints in New Testament times did not so live ; and those who came

immediately after them could desire nothing more than to realize our Lord's prayer for his disciples: 'Not that they should be taken out of the world, but be kept from the evil of it.'"

"Was that *His* prayer?" said Cecily.

"It was. And now, having ventured so far upon a subject on which we have never conversed before, may I ask you to accept from me a copy of the New Testament in Greek which I have with me? In the hour of your lonely studies it will please me that you should have such a memento of an absent friend."

Cecily hesitated, and at last said,—“I know not how to accept such a gift; it is much too costly; and—and—I scarcely think that when Father Cyprian next hears my confession, he will be pleased that one so unlearned as myself should possess such a book.”

“With regard to its costliness,” said Theodore, “it is indeed a treasure beyond all price, and it is for this reason that I desire you should possess it. But as to its mere earthly value, I can replace it when the opportunity occurs; and meanwhile, the greater portion is safely enshrined here;” and he pointed to his head and his heart. “I have thought also about the objections your confessor may raise; but now that new translations of the Sacred Scriptures are being so largely made by the king's order, and also that by means of the printing-press they will soon be widely spread amongst the people, I scarcely thought he would consider it worth while to hinder you from pursuing your study of them in the original.”

“I have not seen Father Cyprian of late,” Cecily replied; “but I know he considers himself my director, and he might object to all that you have been saying. I do not know.”

"For myself, I gladly take all the risk I may incur by presenting you with such a gift, and even by holding this conversation with you. I have had frequent searchings of heart within myself, as to how far a guilty shrinking from causing you pain and disquiet may have withheld me from setting before you more of the truth, even in past times; but the discovery of your prosecution of the study of Greek, of which Edmund had told me somewhat, caused me to make a resolution, that if ever you gave me the opportunity, I would endeavour to place in your hands this holiest of treasures, and trust that, even if it brought you some temporal anxiety, the eternal verities it reveals would far outweigh this, even as it has been with me. And yet," he said, "it is hard to venture for another penalties that one gladly accepts for one's-self."

"Do not fear for me," said Cecily. "If I accept your offer, it shall be as a loan, and at my own peril. If it is a sinful curiosity that makes me hunger for spiritual knowledge, the sin is mine, and the penance will be mine also."

"So let it be," said Theodore; "either as loan or legacy, take the book. I speak as one whose life is in his hand. Sometimes I have thought death nearer to me than life, and it may be so now. And therefore, with this solemn consciousness upon me, I would urge upon you to make this Holy Scripture your study; and in reading it, listen for the voice of the Eternal Spirit Himself, and never let the direction of a fallible mortal induce you to abandon its pure and holy teaching."

Theodore withdrew to his room for a short time, and returning, placed in Cecily's hands a richly-bound volume, interleaved and carefully filled with annotations of his own.

She turned very pale as she received the book; it seemed to her like the last bequest of a dying friend.

"I take it," she said, "in trust, until such time as you come to redeem it."

He bowed his head in token of acquiescence, and so he left her.

The next day after this Theodore again took his leave ; for Hugh, writing from London, told how Bishop Gardiner had compassed the persecution and death of many persons holding the reformed opinions ; and the squire, who felt his honour concerned in Theodore's safety, warned him that the neighbourhood had become a dangerous one for him, for in passing through the village in the dusk of the evening he had seen a tall muffled figure ride up to the priest's house, and, passing as the glance had been, Squire Vivian was convinced that this was Father Cyprian.

"That meddling priest," said he to Theodore, "is a bird of ill omen ; mischief is sure to follow in his train. Therefore, my friend, gladly as I would have kept you, I see your safety may be in flight ; for I know not how far his claws may reach, and his presence here seem to show a determination to dog your steps, and it may be in his power to cause you much inconvenience, if not danger."

Theodore smiled, and thanked the squire. "It seems to show a want of manfulness thus to fly at the approach of the foe," said he ; "but doubtless life is a trust to be preserved for the service of the Great Master, if it be that he has yet some work for his unworthy servant."

"Work ! I should think so—plenty of work," said the squire. "Bide your time, man ; bide your time ! Even my old eyes begin to see the dawn of a brighter day !"

Theodore went silently as he came, but this time not without taking a last farewell of Cecily, and charging her to guard his legacy well.

And so the home nest of Vivian Hall was deserted of all its young life except the fair nursling to whom it had given shelter; and it seemed as if the old birds drew closer together in their solitude,—which was only broken by occasional visits from Evelyn, or news from headquarters detailing the progress of the war.

Cecily meanwhile pursued her studies with redoubled zest. Their nature was such, that, having attained to some degree of proficiency, the subject as well as the language she was studying became very engrossing; and interleaved as Master Theodore's book was, and filled with his comments and notes, she no longer seemed to study alone, but, as it were, with him at her side, suggesting inferences, and applying texts in a way that was quite new to her.

The aged priest who heard her weekly confession, in Father Cyprian's absence, appeared rather to check than encourage prolonged introspection; and if Cecily ventured to propound any difficulties that occasionally occurred to her in the course of her studies, the old man would yawn, and advise her, when such thoughts came into her mind, to repeat twenty credos and the same number of aves, and forget the tormenting questions as fast as she could.

Squire Vivian had nevertheless been quite correct in his surmises; and Father Cyprian, to whom the allotment of the Manor of Pendower to the squire's son-in-law had been especially displeasing, was living in retirement at St. Edel's, keeping a diligent espial on the inmates of Vivian Hall, in the hope of making some discovery which would enable him to bring down Gardiner's myrmidons upon the innocent family.

Theodore's brief stay with them had not been unnoticed; and Father Cyprian still remained in hiding, in the hope that

Theodore might return, when he fully intended to obtain a warrant to search the Hall for heretical books, which he had little doubt in his own mind would be found in the company of so suspicious a person.

As week after week passed on, and nothing occurred to furnish him with a pretext for bringing the laws against heretics into operation, he once more had recourse to the confessional for gaining the information he required. He had received Cecily's confessions more than once since the occasion when his searching investigation had caused her so much disquietude, and finding that she was disposed to carry out the rule of the Church with the most scrupulous fidelity, he had subsequently greatly relaxed his inquisitorial scrutiny.

On the eve of St. Anne's Day, however, when Cecily presented herself in the confessional, Father Cyprian arranged to meet her there. His quick intuition at once discovered that there was some change in her manner of answering since last he received her confession. His suspicions once aroused, a few leading questions soon put him on the right scent, and drew from his reluctant penitent the revelation of her conversation with Theodore, his gift of the book, and her own interest in her new studies.

When he had extracted all the information which it was possible to obtain from that channel, he assumed his sternest manner, and said,—

“Do you know, my daughter, that this fellow, calling himself by the name of ‘Theodore,’ is a most pestilential heretic?”

Cecily trembled. She had, indeed, had many doubts in her own heart as to Theodore's orthodoxy, but to hear him called “a pestilential heretic” was startling in the extreme. In a subdued voice she answered,—

"I knew it not, my father ; he always appeared to me a very godly man."

"A fox in sheep's clothing ; and I see that he has, even now, been tampering with one of the Church's lambs. I tell you, my daughter, that he is a heretic ; and the son of a most accursed heretic, who perished by the just judgment of the Church."

Cecily bowed her head and clasped her hands. This announcement, instead of filling her with the horror she knew she ought to feel, only caused a strange sentiment of pity almost to overcome her.

Father Cyprian continued : "And he who calls himself the lord of this manor receives and harbours in his house this serpent, this corrupter of the faith ! I know not whether he has not, by this act of his, laid himself open to the extremest penalties of the law !"

"Alas, my father," Cecily ventured to exclaim, "the gentleman of whom you speak came an unbidden guest ; and I dare venture my word that no one knew that which you now have told me."

"They shall know it soon," murmured Father Cyprian between his teeth. "But tell me further, child : the book that he left with you—what was it ?"

"The Holy Gospels, and the writings of the blessed apostles."

"What could he give you those for ? Is it not enough that the recreant priest, Cranmer, has worked upon the king to throw pearls before swine, and has caused the mysteries of the Almighty to be unveiled before vulgar eyes, by reading portions of the Sacred Writings in the public services of the sanctuary ?"

"He told me, and I thought," said Cecily timidly, "that, this being allowed by the Church, I should not do wrong in studying the Sacred Book, more particularly in the original !"

"In the original? What! in the Greek language? Surely, child, you dream! In the blessed home of your infancy, Mother Theresa never taught you Greek!"

"No, my father; but some small knowledge of the language I have acquired in the hours of my solitude."

"Enough to lose your soul, and puff you up with the vain conceit of human learning," said Father Cyprian sternly. "Bring me the book. Your penance for your presumption and sin must depend upon the readiness of your atonement."

Cecily hesitated; the book was to her a sacred trust, and even the authority of her confessor was not sufficient to induce her to relinquish this with readiness.

"My father," she faltered, "the book is not mine, it is but a loan; will it not suffice if I bind myself by a vow not to read in it without your permission, and to restore it at the earliest opportunity?"

"Do you attempt to evade my authority?" said the priest. "At your soul's peril, I command you, fetch the book. I await your return, and your obedience."

Cecily rose from her knees, and staggered rather than walked from the church. It was the first time in her life that she had encountered rebuke of so severe a character,—and this, too, from the confessor she most dreaded. Yet, strange to say, she was not utterly crushed. She was half frightened to feel within herself the risings of a feeling of opposition, and almost of rebellion, such as she had never experienced before. Confident in the purity of her intentions, of her fidelity to the Church, it stung her to the quick to be thus misjudged. Also, with regard to Theodore, whatever might be his errors of belief, the conviction of his personal holiness was borne in upon her with a strength and assurance that nothing could gainsay. Bewildered

and dismayed, she sought her treasure. She opened the covering in which she had carefully laid it by, and raising it to her lips, she kissed it reverently with deep emotion, and prepared to return with it to the church.

It, however, happened to occur to the squire that this, being the eve of a great festival, was a very likely time for the dislodged priests of St. Wennon's to be busy in the duties of the confessional; and remembering the authority Father Cyprian possessed over Cecily, a general feeling of suspicion caused him to observe her movements.

He had noticed her as she had first gone to the church, and had heard from herself her object in going. The length of time she was absent suggested to his mind that another than the parish priest was her confessor. When at last he observed her faltering and unwilling steps as she walked towards the house, a strong presentiment seized his mind that mischief was brewing; but when, after a short absence indoors, he saw her again walk towards the church with a hurried and uncertain gait, he followed her quickly, and calling her, saw trouble in her face as she turned towards him.

"Cecily," he said, "what have you there?" as his eye rested on the book she was carrying.

"It is a book," she answered, "that Father Cyprian commanded me to fetch."

"A book! whose book?"

"A book that Master Theodore left with me when he went away."

"Give it to me," said the squire imperatively.

Cecily hesitated, and said,— "But it was lent me by Master Theodore; and now Father Cyprian has charged me to bring it to him, at my soul's peril."

The squire answered by quietly taking the book out of her hands ; and opening it, he said,—

“What is this?”

“It is the New Testament in Greek,” Cecily replied.

“Thank the saints it is nothing worse,” said the squire, “or it might have cost us our heads. However, *I* will take charge of Master Theodore’s book, and will restore it to him as occasion may serve. You may tell Father Cyprian this.”

“But, indeed,” said Cecily in the greatest alarm, “I am afraid that will not satisfy him. He has heard all sorts of things about Master Theodore, and if I come without the book he may think I have not spoken the truth.”

“Never fear,” said the squire ; “I will go with you.”

They entered the church together, and found the priest pacing up and down the aisle with hasty steps. Cecily crossed herself and trembled from head to foot. The squire also sprinkled himself with holy water, and crossed himself before coming up to the encounter, muttering something about evil spirits under monk’s cowl, and the foul fiend.

When Father Cyprian saw that Cecily was not alone, he raised his hand in a menacing attitude, saying in a voice of anger,—

“Who is this that invades the sanctity of the confessional?”

“It is I, Richard Hugh Vivian of Vivian Hall, most reverend father,” said the squire, quite unabashed, “a good churchman, and a faithful liege to my lord King Henry. I come with no evil intent to invade any holy function ; only, finding that this young lady was carrying to you a book, the property of a late guest of mine, I came to say that I, being a justice of the county, do hereby impound the said book, being found on my premises, until such time as the rightful owner shall return to claim it.”

Father Cyprian glared at the squire with lowering eyes, saying,—

“You shall repent this ere long. Vivian Hall is become little better than a nest of traitors and heretics.”

“You may find *your* words difficult of proof,” returned the squire ; “whereas *I* have credible witnesses to prove that, under the seal of confession, you have tampered with the loyalty of the king’s lieges, and even taught them to disregard His Majesty’s royal supremacy as Divine Head of the Church ; therefore I would have you beware. Even at this present time there are great and reverend personages suffering the weight of his grace’s displeasure, and expiating offences in the pillory, for less than yours have been. But, for old acquaintance’ sake, I will forbear to molest you ; only see that you interfere not with my household, nor with those who are dwelling under my roof.”

So saying, the squire walked jauntily away, bearing Master Theodore’s book with him.

The priest ground his teeth, and muttered to himself ; then beckoning Cecily, he resumed his place at the confessional.

With forced calmness he went through the office in his usual manner ; but when Cecily knelt at the end, expecting to receive his absolution and benediction, he said,—

“You have been guilty of a great sin, in consorting with heretics, and listening to their evil suggestions ; especially with regard to this man Theodore, as he is called. In your presumption and ignorance, you are aided and supported by the bold bad man under whose roof you dwell. There is, therefore, no absolution, no benediction for you, until your offence has been atoned for ; and this can only be by the due performance of penances which the Church will appoint you, and by satisfying me of your repentance, by bringing to my hand the book con-

cerning which you made confession, and which was even now wickedly carried away under a false pretence. I also charge you, on your allegiance, to bring to me any other books or writings you may find at Vivian Hall which are favourable to the new learning."

Cecily trembled from head to foot, and felt as if a stone lay upon her heart. She attempted to speak, but the words died upon her tongue. Father Cyprian motioned her to rise and depart, and would give her no further hearing.

Stunned and miserable, she left the church. Never since her infancy had such trouble overtaken her. To be refused absolution, forgiveness, was to make her a spiritual outcast from all grace and hope! What if she should die in her sin! Would even a lengthened period of purgatorial fires cleanse her soul from the taint it had contracted?

Certainly, the means of reparation had been suggested to her; but in this there was little comfort. Moreover, she could not clearly see her sin. She had read no heretical books, and she did not know that Master Theodore was so dangerous a person. Was the study of Greek, and the New Testament Scriptures in the original, so deadly an offence? She could not see it; but yet Father Cyprian said so!

"Holy St. Anne!" she ejaculated, "how have I offended thee, that such trouble should come upon me on thy festival day?"

CHAPTER X.

A DISCOVERY.



THE year following the events recorded in the last chapter, news came down to Pendower that the king was fitting out a fresh armament, and was preparing to take the command of his forces before Boulogne in person. Sir Ralph Oldcastle had become somewhat more reconciled to his new and peaceful occupations since his marriage with Evelyn ; but whenever letters came from the seat of war, all his martial ardour revived, and it was easy to see that his heart was with his old pursuits, and that as yet he was very far from having settled down, as a landlord and country gentleman, in rural solitude and domestic bliss.

He was proud of Evelyn, and she was happy with him ; but he had already begun to suggest that it was time she should show herself at court amongst the fair ladies assembled there : and Evelyn's heart began to flutter, half with pleasure at the thought, and partly with fear lest her country-bred manners should disgrace her in the eyes of her lord.

When, therefore, a missive arrived from London, addressed "To our trusty and well-beloved Ralph Oldcastle, Knight," containing an invitation which amounted to a command, that the said knight should equip men and horse, and accompany

the force which the Earl of Essex commanded to the shores of France, the first cloud appeared on the horizon of Evelyn's married life.

In vain she urged that the wounded arm, which was the original cause of Sir Ralph's withdrawal from the camp, had not recovered its full strength. To this her husband replied, that his heart was as sound as ever in the king's cause, and where he could not wield a weapon, he could counsel and command.

When she spoke of the care of the estate, which would so grievously lack a head, Sir Ralph only smiled, and said that she made a far better queen than he a king in that wild sovereignty, and that he would invest her with ample power to act as regent during his absence—following the example of the lord king himself, who was leaving Queen Katherine in charge of all the realm of England. To this Evelyn made no reply; but yet she wept in secret when she heard the clang of warlike preparations in the armoury, and knew that speedily and rapidly they were advancing towards the end she dreaded.

This, when Sir Ralph discovered it, made him more tender than even was his wont to the fair child-wife whom in his heart he really loved; and he sought to soothe her with promises of treasures to be taken from the French, with which he would adorn the lady of his love.

Then he spoke of the brief time the war was likely to last, and how impossible it was that the French king could hold out against the allied armies of the two most powerful monarchs of the day.

Evelyn listened to the words of comfort, but failed to take them to her heart; only as time passed on, and she saw that remonstrances were of no avail, she ceased to lament outwardly,

and followed her lord in his daily avocations, as though fearful to lose sight of him for one of the precious hours yet remaining.

It will be remembered that the Manor-house of Pendower was originally the Convent of St. Bridget.

At the time of the dispersion of the community, the king's commissioners had taken possession of all the valuables, and most of the parchments relating to the estate ; but becoming weary of investigating all the old and curious manuscripts with which the library abounded, they tumbled a number of them promiscuously into an oaken chest which they found in the lady abbess's room, where there were already a few old records and books of devotion, yellow with age and mildewed with damp.

When Sir Ralph Oldcastle was adapting the ancient edifice to his own particular requirements, he cast his eyes upon the abbess's private apartment, and being struck with the convenience of its situation and suitability to his own purposes, he retained it for his private use ; making no alteration in its furniture and arrangements, except that he opened a lancet-window into a court below, which was once surrounded with cloisters, but had now been turned into a stable-yard. He was in the habit of spending a good deal of time in this apartment, which he called "the Muniment Room," as he could there pursue any in-door occupation he had in hand ; while from his window above he could keep watch upon the grooms and stable-boys as they tended his favourites in the court below.

It was Evelyn's privilege to share this room with her husband, and often she entertained him with the recollections that it awakened of her old convent-life. It was almost the only part of the whole mansion that was quite unchanged ; and

strange fancies often possessed her, as her mind wandered back from the present to the past.

It happened that one wet afternoon, shortly before Sir Ralph's departure for France, he betook himself to this room, accompanied by Evelyn, to arrange his papers, as he said, and to put into her keeping the deed of gift by which the Manor of St. Bridget had been bestowed upon him. He had put this by, along with some ancient records relating to the estate, upon his first arrival at Pendower, and had never looked at it since; and now, by no effort of memory could he remember which secure hiding-place he had chosen amongst the many that existed.

"It may have been concealed in the large oaken chest," suggested Evelyn.

"I think not; but you shall seek it there, while I go through the old lady's muniment press," said the knight, tossing a heavy key to Evelyn.

The search went on in silence for some time, Sir Ralph being occupied in sorting and arranging, as he went, papers of receipts and expenditure supplied to him from time to time by his bailiff and manciple.

Evelyn meanwhile was displacing the contents of the chest, taking out the parchments and books which she found there, and arranging them on the floor beside her. Those she found at the top were chiefly books of devotion and missals, that had been thrown carelessly into the chest when they were removed from the library.

A furious south-west wind and a pitiless rain were raging outside, and her husband's attention was absorbed with his own occupation, so that Evelyn by degrees fell to examining the writings as she removed them. Her attention was attracted by

numerous and beautiful specimens of illumination and exquisite pieces of writing, evidently the work of nuns in remote times, when a more intellectual and artistic spirit had prevailed in the convent than under the somewhat easy and luxurious *régime* of Mother Theresa.

As Evelyn proceeded further in her search, and reached the manuscripts at the bottom of the chest, she found their character was greatly changed. Instead of the richly-coloured books of devotion and offices of prayer, the more ancient manuscripts, though some were still written in Latin, appeared to be diaries kept by the abbesses who had formerly ruled the community. Some of these were in English, and Evelyn began to attempt to decipher the crabbed handwritings, and to read the records that the dead had left behind them. Some of these diaries breathed a spirit of devotion and earnest aspiration, others appeared to be kept merely as an outlet for the feelings of suppressed fretfulness and discontent on the part of the writers; but the most part were simply a record of small daily events in convent-life, which might have taken place at any time, and have been the history of any community.

The monotonous character of these records caused Evelyn to proceed more briskly in her work, when, as she had almost removed the last roll of manuscript from the chest, her eye caught sight of a flat packet lying quite at the bottom, and sealed with a large seal.

Thinking this might be the document of which she had been in search, she drew it forth with exultation; but on bringing it to the light she perceived that, although not so old as the manuscripts she had displaced, it was of too ancient a date to have been executed of late years.

It was tied with a broad black ribbon, carefully sealed, and

inscribed,—“The last dying confession of me, Agnes, Abbess of St. Bridget’s, made under remorse of conscience to the Great Revealer of secrets and Absolver of sin, for the salvation of my own soul and the benefit of all whom it may concern. Written a few hours before death, on the Eve of St. Agnes, 1490.”

“What can this be?” said Evelyn, much excited by the discovery.

Sir Ralph looked at the superscription, and tossed it away contemptuously, saying,—

“Only the fanciful ravings of some squeamish old woman, who was alike disordered in body and mind.”

“Ah! but you do not know,” said Evelyn, “that the nuns had a story in my time, which they only spoke of under their breath in the strictest secrecy,—that there once was an abbess here, who was found to be holding heretical views, and she either took poison herself, or died under torture by the command of the Prior of St. Wennon’s, who was visitor here at the time. Anyway, she died miserably; and her body was not buried in consecrated ground, so her soul never had rest; and the nuns said she had been seen many times in the cloisters on the Eve of St. Agnes, when she died. But she was always draped in black, not in white like other spirits, and seemed to be weeping and wringing her hands!”

“Stuff and nonsense,” said Sir Ralph bluntly.

“But it is quite true that there was such a person,” persisted Evelyn; “and she was the abbess but one before Mother Theresa. I wish I might open this writing. May I?”

“Well, the writing can’t have been by a ghost,” said Sir Ralph. “Look at it, if you like.”

Evelyn’s hands trembled as she broke the great seal and untied the ribbon; still more so as, on opening the cover,

another parchment fell out, written in a different hand, and sealed with a signet, the impression of which was somehow familiar to her.

She first read with quivering lips the history given by the unfortunate Agnes,—who stated, with much contrition, how that in her time the rule of the convent had become very lax, and the daily dole and charitable bequests had been neglected, and the number of the sisterhood not filled up, in order that the remainder might have more money to lay out in expensive luxuries and pleasures ; and how, notwithstanding all this, debts had accumulated, and the resources of the convent had become straitened, until the abbess knew not where to look for relief from her difficulties ; and then, how temptation to a further sin came in her way, by means of a begging friar, who came one day to her gates, the bearer of a document which, he said, he had sworn upon the Holy Book, by the bedside of a dying man, to deliver into no hands but hers. She then related how she found this document to be the last will and testament of her kinsman, Sir Richard Pendower, the lord of the manor, who had lately fallen on the field of Bosworth, and had made his last shrift to the friar aforesaid ; and had made a bequest of his property to his infant daughter, with the exception of a small acreage in the Manor of Pendower, which he bequeathed to the Convent of St. Bridget for masses to be said for his soul in times to come.

The will was brief, and had been written in haste in a wayside house near the battlefield ; and there was no witness but the friar, who had acted both as priest and lawyer on the occasion ; but it was sealed with the dead man's signet-ring, which also the friar brought with him in attestation of his veracity.

The abbess then related how she sought the advice of the Prior of St. Wennon's, her friend and accomplice, Juanito by name ; and how they fabricated another will, a facsimile of the real one, but leaving the bulk of the knight's property to the administration of the Priors of St. Wennon's and the Abbesses of St. Bridget's, to provide lights in a chantry to be added to the Convent of St. Bridget, in which masses should continually be said for the soul of Sir Richard Pendower. The small acreage above alluded to was to remain as a foundation for a fresh member to be added to the community of St. Bridget, always to be elected from the family of Pendower.

The abbess further stated how that no one knew of the transaction but herself and the prior ; and that the latter had found means to secure the silence of the friar, either by bribery, or "some other means," as she ominously said.

She then related how, not altogether trusting the prior, she had concealed the true will, which she had given him to understand had been destroyed ; but which, she thought, she might find a use for some day. Then she proceeded to state how the increased wealth of the establishment brought increased care ; and how she was haunted with fears and evil dreams ; and how in vain she made confession of her misery to the prior, whose absolution brought no peace to her soul ; and how she began to revive the long neglected daily offices ; and how, one evening at vespers, the words of Psalm cxxxix. struck such fear into her heart, that, stricken with the conviction of her sin, she implored the prior at her next confession to allow her to make restitution to the family who had been defrauded, but that he sought to quiet her scruples by saying that the property was devoted to a higher use than it could be by remaining in the hands of any secular person. Then, still haunted by a fear of the presence of

God, she redoubled her austerities ; and having learned Latin in her childhood, commenced a diligent study of the Vulgate, to seek for herself from the fountain-head that direction which the ministrations of the Church had failed to supply,—which, when the prior discovered, he commenced a series of persecutions on a charge of heresy, confining her to her own apartment, and only allowing chosen minions of his own to come near her person. How, finally, she was tried by a chapter of foreign ecclesiastics convened by the prior, who brought up against her such convincing proofs of heresy, that she was condemned without a dissentient voice ; the only mercy shown her was, that on account of her noble birth she was to be allowed to drink a cup of poison instead of suffering death by fire. Her body was to be buried in a vault outside the consecrated precincts ; but seeing that she showed contempt for the Church's ordinances, and refused confession and absolution, no masses were to be said for the repose of her soul : and but six hours were allowed her, from the time of her sentence being given, to prepare for death in the solitude of her chamber.

The unhappy woman went on to say that she employed the last hours of existence in writing this confession, and that she intended to conceal it, together with the will, in an oaken chest which had never been examined in her days, but which contained the writings of former abbesses from very early times. This, she thought, was the only chance of undoing the mischief she had done ; and she trusted to the good providence of God that this, her dying prayer, might be heard, and that the consequences of the evil she had done might not follow her beyond the grave. For the rest, she believed that God was more merciful than man, and she desired, like David of old, to fall into his hands. She believed, also, that he who forgave the dying thief

had the power to forgive sins without the intervention of priest or ordinance ; and she trusted that he who knew the secrets of her heart, knew the reality of her repentance, as well as the greatness of her iniquity. To his mercy alone she therefore commended her soul.

Evelyn laid down the paper with a groan of dismay and horror. "I never could have believed anything half so dreadful !" she exclaimed.

Sir Ralph looked up, and seeing her pallid countenance and frightened eyes, he glanced at the manuscript and began to read. By degrees his attention became concentrated on the narrative ; and finally he took up the will, which he carefully examined—Evelyn meantime watching him in silence.

"What do you think of it ?" at last she asked.

"Think !" said Sir Ralph with affected lightness ; "why, that this is only another proof of what a lot of thieves and varlets these 'religious persons,' as they call themselves, really are. You are such a dear, innocent child that it is all new to you. Even now one does not know what deception there may be at the bottom of it ;" and he returned to the will again.

"I know the impress of the signet," said Evelyn. "It is just that of Cecily's heirloom. She has often told me it is the only relic remaining to her of her grandfather, Sir Richard Pendower. Mother Theresa found it among the treasures of the convent, and gave it to her."

"Indeed !" said Sir Ralph musingly ; and he remained for a few moments buried in thought.

"And what shall we do," continued Evelyn, "about the property ? It ought to be Cecily's."

"Ah !" said her husband, as if thinking to himself. "That portion of the estate which came from Sir Richard Pendower is

the only part that is free and unencumbered, the rest is heavily mortgaged. It would really leave nothing of the king's gift but the house, if the property were to be divided. But tell me, is not Cecily going to be a nun?"

"So she has always said," Evelyn replied.

"She looks it; and I know she has always hated me," said the knight. "I tell you what, Evelyn: if this property were given to her, she would only make it over to a fresh set of knaves; and, besides, the king is the supreme head in Church and State, and it is his royal will that this estate should belong to me,—so here goes."

There was a fire burning on the hearth, for the day was chilly and gloomy, and as Sir Ralph spoke he threw the writings into the glowing embers; muttering, as he did so, that he would be wiser in his generation than the old prior.

Evelyn, however, beheld the destroying flames seize on the manuscripts with dismay, and darting forward, attempted to rescue them. She drew out the abbess's confession before it had sustained any injury except that of being blackened with the smoke, the thickness of the paper preserving it from taking fire easily; but the will had already been scorched and singed, and now fell from her hands like so much tinder—that portion of it to which the seal was attached alone remaining unburned.

"What are you doing?" said Sir Ralph in a tone of thunder, his eyes flashing with anger.

Evelyn gazed at him in fear and astonishment. She had seen her husband angry when his will was crossed, but it was the first time he had spoken harshly to her, and she burst into tears, making no answer in words.

"Do you dare dispute my will?" he continued in high wrath.

"Put these papers down, and do not meddle in what does not concern you."

But Evelyn continued to hold fast the precious documents; and gathering up her courage, she said, "Oh, do not burn it! Perhaps it is the last request I shall ever make of you. Let me keep it; pray do."

Sir Ralph's wrath was somewhat mitigated by the pleading look and beautiful face which was turned towards his, and he said,—

"What would you do with it, foolish child? As soon as I am gone, you will go and prate about it to Cecily; and then some mumbling old priest will get hold of the news, and there is no knowing what might come of such interference."

"No, indeed," said Evelyn. "How can you have so poor an opinion of me! I have never told any one a secret of yours. Do try me. Let me keep the writing, and I will promise you never to tell anybody without your leave."

"I cannot think what good the old musty thing will do you," said Sir Ralph. "It had much better be burned;" and he approached as if to take it from her. But Evelyn followed up her advantage, and throwing her arms about his neck, coaxed and persuaded him until he was fairly conquered; and she, overjoyed at having rescued the interesting relic, said,—

"There, we will put it in the private drawer of your bureau, amongst your most precious papers, and it shall be kept locked up with them until your return; and, if you like, I will promise not even to look at it during your absence."

"Well," said he gravely, "the sooner you forget it the better. The old woman's maundering fancies can do no one much harm, and the will is destroyed. You see, Evelyn, although there can be no doubt that the estate is rightfully mine, that

will, falling into the hands of mischievous people, might have injured the title, and produced a great deal of trouble ; so the less said about these circumstances the better."

Evelyn in her heart did not see so plainly as her husband seemed to do, that his right to the estate was beyond a doubt ; indeed, the inflexible principles of rectitude which the squire had impressed upon all his children, prompted her to say that the property, which had been acquired by the late abbess for the community by craft and cruelty, ought never to have become the king's to give, but should have been restored to the rightful heir, and that honesty required that such reparation should even now be made. But prudence suggested that, having so far gained her point as to be allowed to preserve the confession of Mother Agnes, it would be advisable to defer all further discussion with her husband until his present irascible condition should have passed away.

She therefore took the key of his private drawer, and unlocking and opening it, she removed a few papers to place the treasured relics at the bottom. In doing this she turned out the deed of gift, the search for which had led to this discovery being made. Sir Ralph was rejoiced to see it, and remarking that it could not be in a better place, laid it back again in the drawer, which he then locked, and gave the key to Evelyn, charging her to preserve it with care during his absence.

Thus it happened that the ancient manuscript and the modern title-deed lay side by side in the same receptacle.

Sir Ralph never again alluded to the circumstances before his departure, neither did Evelyn venture to touch upon the subject. Indeed, it was painful to her to recall the only unkind expression which her husband had ever used towards herself ; and as the days fled past which yet remained before his de-

parture, that event seemed to absorb all others. And when at last the morning arrived which was to take him from her, and she had received her last kiss, and watched the last wave of his hand from the highest battlement, she was absorbed with the intensity of a first real sorrow, and fell back in the arms of her women, weeping bitterly, and believing that no grief ever equalled her own ! Mother Agnes and her history faded from her mind, or were only remembered as a terrible dream.

CHAPTER XI.

THE MANOR-HOUSE OF PENDOWER.



WHILE these events were passing at Pendower, Cecily had more and more taken a daughter's place to the Squire and Dame Vivian. She had never yet been able to make up her mind to visit Evelyn at her new home, but her presence at St. Edel's made it more feasible for Evelyn to have the pleasure of several visits from her mother, and occasionally from her father also. Evelyn herself, however, had only once been able to prevail upon her husband to accompany her to make any prolonged stay at Vivian Hall; and on that occasion such a strong repulsion became evident between Sir Ralph and her early friend, that the very friendship itself was in danger of growing cool.

The truth was, that Cecily's mind was troubled by a great conflict that was going on within her soul; and she was more capable at that time of sympathizing with the sorrowful than with the gay.

Ever since her last confession to Father Cyprian she had felt herself a spiritual outcast, and knew not where to look for guidance or support. She had struggled with the rising feeling of insubordination with which she had left the church; and by the help, as she believed, of St. Anne, and numerous austerities

and penances which she imposed upon herself, she succeeded in calming the tumult within ; and even made herself believe that she was ready to perform the sacrifice required of her, and to give up the precious book were it once more in her possession.

With this impression on her mind, she prepared again to meet Father Cyprian. She even went so far, in trying to atone for her error, as to ask the squire whether, as the book had been committed to her, he would not allow her to resume the charge of it, whatever the consequences might be ; but her suggestion met with no encouragement. The squire only said, that as there seemed to be a controversy about the expediency of such studies, it were better that he should retain it, being, as it were, the representative of the king's government in that part of the country. With which reply Cecily was obliged to be satisfied ; nor had she much difficulty in being so, although the readiness with which she acquiesced in the squire's decision made her feel less able to face the ordeal of confession.

She, however, conquered her reluctance to meet her confessor, and at the time appointed set forth to the church. To her surprise, however, Father Cyprian was not there, although not many days previously she had received from him an order to meet him at that time. After waiting a little while, the old village priest shuffled into the church, and mumbled a few indistinct words to Cecily, by which she understood that he was to receive her confession.

Much as Cecily had dreaded her interview with Father Cyprian, confession to this old man was especially disagreeable to her on this occasion. Her mind had been wrought into a high state of spiritual activity by the exercises in which she had

been engaged, and she felt she needed the assistance of a master-mind to put the finishing touch to the self-abasement and humiliation of her soul. Without such assistance, how could she know whether her contrition would be accepted, and the will taken for the deed? How could reconciliation be effected between herself and that Almighty One, whose ministers had the power of effecting this reconciliation between sinners and himself?

The old priest was half blind and very deaf, and this latter infirmity made a long confession a very trying process. However, Cecily resolved to undergo the penalty as part of the atonement for her offence; and banishing from her mind all thought of the individual in the sacredness of his office, she commenced a recital of all the spiritual conflict she had undergone. Absorbed in the subject, and anxious to evince the sincerity of her intentions, her confession was very full and detailed; and concluding from what the priest had said, when he first met her, that Father Cyprian had put him in possession of the particulars of her offence, she took more pains to acknowledge every shortcoming than she might have considered necessary had Father Cyprian himself been present to apply the probe to her conscience. At length, wearied with the mental effort such a confession involved, and with the pains she took to make her speech audible, she finished her recital, and waited for the sentence the priest would pronounce.

But finding that no word came from his lips, she glanced towards him, and perceived that he had fallen fast asleep in the arm-chair in which he was seated. A flush almost of indignation rushed to her face, and hastily rising, she was about to leave the confessional, when the old man, disturbed by the movement, began to mutter,—“Benedicite! you have made a

good confession, my daughter ; though I lost somewhat of the last few words. Kneel, and receive thine absolution." And without waiting for her reply, he hastily recited the form of words with which long use had made him familiar.

Cecily left the church more perplexed than when she had entered it ; and the words of Elijah rose to her mind, when, speaking of their false god to the prophets of Baal, he said, "He sleepeth, and must be awakened." Was it indeed certain that such miraculous power was given to the priesthood, that these holy words from their lips would take effect on the soul of the penitent however and whenever applied ? Might it not, indeed, be better to confess sin to some spiritual being who never slept ; or, as was done by those of the new way of thinking, to Christ himself ?

The comfort of assured absolution would then be lost ; but could she be certain that such absolution as she had just received would avail her soul ? Again doubts and perplexities began to assail her. Texts of Scripture that she had read, or heard read, crowded into her mind as so many temptations to an amount of unbelief in the superstitions of her early life, that filled her soul with dread. And in her lonely hours she pictured to herself the agony of living, and above all of dying, with such doubts in her mind, and no assured hope or knowledge of truth to take their place.

She wondered, too, what had become of Father Cyprian, and why he should have sent for her, and then so suddenly have failed to keep the appointment he had made himself. Some light was, however, thrown upon that obscure point by the squire, who asked her one day,—

"Has Father Cyprian ever met you again since the day he and I had that passage-at-arms ?"

"No, never," said Cecily; "although he sent for me. I have wondered at it."

"Ha, ha!" said the squire, with a chuckle, "I thought as much. I have had to teach him somewhat of the strength of the secular arm under good King Hal. I happened to have become acquainted with a passage in his life which contravened the king's express command that he should be regarded as supreme head of the Church in this land, by all persons, whether ecclesiastical or secular. And so I played my best card, and set my knowledge of Father Cyprian's slip in this matter against Master Theodore's book; and the result is that he has betaken himself to flight. I must be wary, however, that he does not reappear, with sharpened fangs, at a time when I least expect it."

Father Cyprian, however, did not appear; and further modifications of the laws on religious subjects having taken place, the squire occasionally, in the following winter, would produce Theodore's book and request Cecily to translate portions to him, and to read the notes appended to it; which she, having decided to resume her studies of the Greek language, was only too well pleased to do. Occasionally, when a passage was too hard for her powers of construing, she would, the following day, make a pilgrimage to the church, to consult the English Bible which had been placed there by the king's command. And it was wonderful how, in such studies, the time would fly; and how her former impression, that it was irreverent to read the Holy Writings in the vulgar tongue, had faded away; and how they seemed to hold her soul with a strange fascination, as the homely, familiar language touched her affections. The truth was, that the atmosphere of controversy had ceased around her; and in the calm that succeeded, the words of

hope and peace were beginning to find an abiding-place in the aching void that had been created in her soul.

It was during this period of tranquil study, that the news of Sir Ralph's summons to the seat of war reached Vivian Hall ; and soon after his departure, Dame Vivian went to Pendower, with the intention of persuading her daughter to return with her, and reside under her father's roof during the time of her husband's absence. But this Evelyn refused to do. She was strongly impressed with the confidence that her husband reposed in her, in leaving to her charge the care of his household and estate ; and after the first paroxysm of grief at his departure had passed away, Evelyn was possessed with a restless desire to see, with her own eyes, that every order of his was being carried out with scrupulous exactness.

The out-of-door life she had led with her young brothers, and the companionship of her father, had given her more experience than was common to women in the management of landed property ; and every day the steward came to receive her orders, and to ride forth with her to visit certain farms, and to inspect the improvements that were being carried on in different parts of the estate. So Dame Vivian found that her company was little needed by her independent little daughter, and did not therefore unnecessarily prolong her stay, but came home again to tell her husband that Evelyn was master and mistress both, now that her lord was away ; and that her time was so taken up with planting and felling, and hawking and hunting, the care of the falcons, the dogs, and the horses, that she could almost take her to be one of her brothers,—and that her father would be better company for her than her mother.

The squire laughed at this, and soon went in his turn to visit his favourite child ; and perceived, as her mother had said, that

she had thrown all her energies into the occupations that would properly have been her husband's had he remained at home. Moreover, he saw that the active employment and fresh air which these pursuits gave her kept the colour in her cheeks and the brightness in her eyes ; and that it was only in the evening, when the work of the day was done, that her spirits flagged, and that a certain weariness and listlessness crept into her manner.

To remove her from the many interests that surrounded her, he saw, would be a mistake, as he told Dame Vivian on his return ; but yet they both agreed that some one should be there besides the servants, as the companion of her lonely hours.

"How would it be if we were to send Cecily over to bear her company?" suggested Dame Vivian.

"The very thing," said the squire. "Only, when I mentioned it to Evelyn, she showed no interest in the matter, saying that she thought Cecily would not like to come."

"I know that Cecily has never liked Sir Ralph," the lady replied ; "but now that Evelyn is alone, I cannot see what objection she can have to going to Pendower."

"Nor I," said the squire ; "unless it is owing to some nonsense that meddling old monk has put in her head, about the dissolution of the nunnery ; but now that I have good reason to think he has sailed for Spain, I hope that will soon die out."

"Well, I will ask her," continued Dame Vivian. "And I shall say that Evelyn wishes it ; as of course she does, as Cecily has always been her greatest friend ; only she would not say so, out of thought for us."

The squire agreed, but sighed. He had learned to value the companionship of the gentle and thoughtful maiden, who so

long had been under his roof, and had become almost a second daughter.

When Dame Vivian first broached the subject to Cecily, she started, and was on the point of refusing the request ; but feeling that this would be unkind towards her early friend, she conquered her first impulse, saying,—

“ If Evelyn really wants me.”

“ Of course she does,” said Dame Vivian, speaking more from her imagination than from her knowledge of her daughter’s real feelings. “ Of course she does ; and if you will go, the squire will ride over with you, and you shall give her a surprise, and then you will see.”

Cecily, thus urged, agreed to pay Evelyn a visit, and the very next day set forth with the squire.

From his knowledge of his daughter’s habits, they so timed their journey as to arrive within sight of the woods of Pendower just as the September sun was sinking behind the hill which rose on the further side of the valley.

Cecily reined in her horse as the once familiar view met her eye. There lay the peaceful valley in deep shadow, with the tall elm-trees which bordered the stream rising in the midst. There rose the well-proportioned tower of the village church, where the effigies of her own ancestors were lying in holy ground—fallen warriors, grim and solemn in their sculptured repose. And close at hand, nestled amongst the trees, were the battlements and chimneys of the old nunnery ; now the manor-house, and Evelyn’s home. The blue smoke curled upwards from the pile of buildings, and following its course the eye was led from the dim and shadowy valley to the heights above, rich with the variegated tints of autumn leaves ; and brighter still, behind the topmost trees, the ruddy flush of the

evening sky glowed and brightened behind their swaying boughs. For now the west wind was blowing, and brought landwards, as it rushed over the hill, the sound of the breakers on the coast, which so long had been strange to Cecily's ear.

It was widely different from the open and less richly cultivated neighbourhood of Vivian Hall ; and Cecily's heart yearned to it as to home, and she could not suppress a sigh as she thought of the past. But knowing how little her companion would understand such feelings, she said nothing about them, but followed him down the steep descent into the village ; and after winding about amongst the gabled cottages which formed the village street, they crossed the rustic bridge, ascended a gentle incline, and paused at the massive gates that once formed the entrance to the convent. Giving their horses to a groom who came at their call, they dismounted, and the squire led the way through the paved yard, and up a winding staircase which opened into Evelyn's sitting-room.

They stole upon her noiselessly ; and through the open door they saw her, by the firelight, sitting on the floor in front of the blazing hearth, her hat and riding-whip thrown aside, as if she had just come in ; and yet they had heard from the servants that it was more than half an hour since she had returned from her rounds. As Cecily looked at her fair young face, she fancied she saw upon it the first shadow of sorrow that earth's troubles had ever thrown upon it, and the love of early days arose in her heart with renewed intensity.

All at once Evelyn perceived that she was not alone ; and when, as she turned, she saw who her visitors were, her face became radiant with smiles of welcome, and she exclaimed,—

“ My father ! And Cecily too ! This is kind ! ”

But even as she spoke her smiles died out, a paleness overspread her face, and her countenance fell.

The sight of Cecily recalled Mother Agnes, her discovery of the will, and the fraud by means of which her friend was an unconscious sufferer. But for Cecily the warmth of the first welcome was enough. The after-thought, and the changes of manner it produced, were attributed by her to quite other causes ; and she addressed herself to the task of pleasing and amusing Evelyn, in perfect unconsciousness of the twinges of conscience which her friend was feeling as they talked together of the past and present. And the restraint which was occasionally felt by both of them, though caused by the knowledge of such an important secret, was attributed by Cecily to the fact that her friend was now the property of another, and as such that there was a limit to the confidence which in old times had been perfectly unrestrained. Still Cecily seemed now so completely to have been adopted into her friend's family, that there was no lack of mutual topics of interest. They spoke of Evelyn's absent brothers, who were now with the army abroad ; and even of Edmund, of whom news had lately been received, and who, it appeared, had been leading a wandering life amongst the various seats of learning in Germany, and had lately removed to the Low Countries, where the new religion was making rapid advances among the populations of the great cities.

All foreign intelligence, however, was of necessity so carefully worded, that no one could gather any idea of the thoughts and opinions of the writer ; but there was one fact mentioned that was of interest both to the squire and Cecily,—that Edmund's object in taking his last journey was to meet a very dear friend. Why, they scarcely knew, but they both arrived at the same

conclusion,—that this could be no other than Theodore ; and the father thought that his son would, through this trusty channel, be cheered with news of his home from one who had sojourned under his roof. And Cecily's mind went back to the past, and wondered whether Theodore would impart to Edmund the discovery he had made concerning her studies ; and unconsciously she fell into a reverie, and speculated on the difference in the character of the two friends, and the impression they had severally made upon herself. She was conscious that a warm interest she had once felt in Edmund had been succeeded by a sort of disappointment quite distinct from the annoyance his suit to herself had occasioned. The restlessness of his speculations had wearied her, and had caused her to cling more closely to the well-defined faith of her childhood. And yet, a deep pity softened this repellent aspect of his character ; the more so as the changes the last five years had wrought in her own opinions and prospects pressed upon her, as she looked around upon the scenes so changed and yet the same.

She was aware that these external changes were trifling, as compared with those that had gone on within her own soul. The narrow circle that had bounded her earthly horizon had been much enlarged. Formerly, the approbation of Mother Theresa, Sister Maria, and a few of the elder nuns reckoned as saints in the convent, had been her highest aim as regarded her daily life ; but then, the more exclusively religious life of those days appeared, as she looked back, to have been more concentrated, more exalted, with none of the conflict that now was too frequent in her hours of devotion.

And yet, a dim consciousness was dawning upon her that a life of ministry to others, in however humble a sphere, might be more Christ-like, and even more self-sacrificing, than the

spiritual raptures of a saint within convent-walls. "May it not be," she thought, "that I have been desiring the crown before the cross? May not a selfish desire for spiritual glory mar the holiness, even of the highest religious life? Did *He* thus live who is our pattern, our great example? Did even the blessed Virgin herself or the apostles thus aim to raise themselves whilst still pilgrims upon earth?"

Cecily's recent studies in her Greek Testament enabled her to answer these questionings without hesitation. And when, the next day, the squire asked her whether she would return with him, or stay a while with Evelyn, she resolved to choose the harder path; and when her friend, with a faltering voice, pleaded for a few days of her company, Cecily without hesitation answered,—

"For as long as you like to keep me, Evelyn dear."

CHAPTER XII.

THE COTTAGE ON THE MOORS.



ECILY'S stay with her friend Evelyn proved to be of longer duration than they either of them imagined when the invitation was at first given and accepted.

Month after month passed by, and the news from the seat of war gave little prospect of the return of Sir Ralph.

First came the tidings that the emperor had withdrawn from all active operations, and had finally made a separate peace with Francis, leaving England to bear all the brunt of the war.

"A perfidious and time-serving ally, as he ever was," the squire observed when the news reached him; "trained in falsehood and treachery from his cradle by monks and churchmen, who have hung about him like leeches from the time he could speak. It is well that England has learned to trust to her own stout arm, and can maintain her own."

"But they say the news from court is bad," said Evelyn, who had ridden to Vivian Hall to hear the tidings to her father and mother. "My lord king is said to be failing in health, and the queen's grace is for ever nursing him."

"God grant he may yet be spared to see the nation through this trouble," said the squire.

Then followed alarms of invasion by the French; and though

the rock-bound coast in the neighbourhood of Pendower was sufficient protection to that part of the country, yet often would Evelyn and Cecily ascend the high cliffs overlooking the sea, and watch the vessels in the far distance, to observe whether a foreign sail could be discovered among them, or whether any appearance of a French fleet could ever be discerned. Evelyn had all her plans ready in case such an event should take place, and had arranged how beacons should be fired from hill to hill to apprise her father of the approach of the foe. But no such alarm came ; and after long waiting and an anxious silence came the news that Boulogne was taken, and that Sir Ralph had been appointed to a responsible command in the garrison. Then followed tidings of peace being concluded between England and France ; and the bells rang merry peals from every church tower, and Evelyn confidently expected her lord's return. But in this she was disappointed, for the next tidings were that he was continued in his command ; and as the English continued to hold Boulogne for King Henry, and there was much to be done to repair the damage wrought during the siege, officers of experience were required there to take charge of the garrison, and Sir Ralph was especially named as one of these.

At this Evelyn was half angry, and inclined to think that he might have come home if he would ; but Cecily soothed her, and at last she was able to feel the honour done to her husband as some consolation for the disappointment she experienced herself.

At the same time the squire received news of his sons from some of his own men, who, being discharged when peace was made, returned to their own village. From their account it seemed that they had betaken themselves to the court of the Elector of Saxony, with the intention of serving as volunteers in

the war that was breaking out between the Protestant princes of Germany and the emperor.

The protracted absence of their children, and the long period of suspense and anxiety, told visibly upon the squire and Dame Vivian, and led to more frequent intercourse between the two families. Evelyn saw with pain the dimness of age gathering over her mother's bright blue eyes, and her father's hair turn from gray to white, and the lines on his countenance deepen as with anxious thought.

Many times she urged that Cecily should return to cheer their home; but to this both father and mother objected, saying, "We have one another and our people to look to, but you have no one. Keep the sister that God has sent you, till the return of your lord."

And Evelyn would answer, "But I am young, and you are old, and need her most."

Yet still the squire's will prevailed; and Cecily, seeing such was the case, could only acquiesce.

It seemed to her as if, during this period of her life, she had no will, no purpose of her own. She missed the spiritual guidance to which she had been accustomed from her earliest years, and had nothing definite to fall back upon. Even for a home she was dependent, or almost dependent, on the bounty of a family to which she was in no way related; and the strangeness of her lot, in being as it were a pensioner in the home of her fathers, struck her more forcibly when residing at Pendower than at Vivian Hall. The names of places, the traditions among the peasantry, all had some connection with her own ancestors, and with these she became much more acquainted whilst Evelyn's guest than she could have been as an inmate of the convent. For, in truth, her life was very solitary, and it some-

times struck her that her friend rather shunned than courted her society. Seeing this, she ceased to accompany her in her out-of-door pursuits, and often spent her mornings in study, and her afternoons in lone rambles. In former times there had been a covered way for the nuns to pass from the convent to the rood-loft in the church, and this entrance was still available for those who chose to make use of it. Daily mass had long ago ceased, but an aged monk of the late brotherhood of St. Wennon received a pension from the estate, as payment for performing a very mongrel service there on Sundays. It was half English and half Latin; but it might have been entirely in the unknown tongue for any good it did the hearers, as the monk could read but very imperfectly, and was at no pains to make himself understood, evidently having no heart in the matter; which when the people perceived, they by degrees discontinued their attendance at the house of God: the splendid ritual which had once in their eyes represented the mysteries of heaven having ceased, and no spiritual sustenance having been provided in its place, the natural effect upon the people was a perceptible relapse into semi-heathenism. Upon Cecily the dearth of external help stimulated her to seek for herself that which her soul needed. At first she ransacked the old library, which remained in much the same state as the king's visitors had left it; but nothing that she found there seemed to supply the vacuum that had been created since her readings in Theodore's Testament were discontinued.

Then it was that she bethought herself of the English Bible in the church, and daily she betook herself thither by the nuns' way; and fresh from these studies she would ramble forth, and make acquaintances amongst the poor of the district.

One evening she had extended her walk much farther than

usual, when she came upon a farmhouse on a lonely heath. She thought she would ask the farmer's wife for a cup of milk, making sure that the house belonged to one of Evelyn's tenants.

She tapped gently at the door, and was in the midst of making her request, when the woman who had answered her summons changed colour, and said,—

"You do not know *me*! But I cannot be mistaken; surely you are Cecily Tremaine!"

Cecily started. Something in the voice and in the eye at once suggested Sister Lucy, and almost unconsciously she uttered the words.

"That was once my name," said the woman, her pale cheek now suffused with a burning blush. "It is perhaps better to say at once what I *am*, and you can despise me if you will. I am now John Holdworthy's wife."

She stood at the door holding it open, but making no motion to Cecily to enter; apparently she expected that she would turn and leave her.

Cecily hesitated. She was in the presence of a sinner who, according to the old creed, had fallen from very heaven itself to a place so low that redemption was all but impossible. She felt inexpressibly shocked; but yet there was something so pleading, and even innocent, in the face before her, that she felt she could not turn away from her. A commonplace question rose to her lips,—

"Do you live here?"

"Yes; this is my home. Will you come in?" she added, observing Cecily's hesitation. "There is one here you might like to look upon."

Cecily bowed her head, and followed Lucy Holdworthy into an inner room.

In the chimney-corner, propped up by pillows, and breathing with difficulty, sat an aged woman, still wearing the habit of a religious person. Although much changed by suffering and age, it was not difficult for Cecily to recognize the lineaments of Mother Theresa.

"Mother," said Lucy, going up to her and speaking in her ear, "here is one of your children—will you speak to her?"

Mother Theresa's wandering eye for a moment caught Cecily's, and seemed to light up with intelligence. "My daughter," she said, "come to your mother and receive her dying blessing."

Cecily knelt before her, and the old woman, placing her hands on her head, solemnly blessed her; then pressing her hand to her head, she said in a perplexed and troubled manner,—

"Cecily Tremaine! Cecily Tremaine! I know I had something to say to her before I died. Who was Sir Richard Pendower? What is it all about? Have you kept the signet-ring? Have you brought me a priest to shrive me?"

Then the poor old woman fell to weeping bitterly, and Lucy motioned Cecily aside.

"She knew you. Her mind is not quite gone. But it is piteous to hear her crying for a priest to shrive her. She is ever saying that she cannot die, because no priest will come to release her soul; and sometimes she fancies that she is in purgatory, and her spirit can get no release, because there is no priest to pray for her. Often I have longed to go and seek for one and bring him to her, but my husband will not let me. He says he will have no priest here, because—because—" And again the colour mounted to her temples.

"But how came you here?" asked Cecily. "I thought the

mother and you had been provided with a fitting home ; and this place is so lonely, so weird."

Then Lucy told how, when the community was dissolved, Mother Theresa and herself had found a home with the widow of a substantial yeoman, whose son had a large sheep-farm on the downs ; how after a time the widow fell ill, and would have none but Lucy to nurse her, until at last she died. During this time Mother Theresa fell into worse health, and young Holdworthy, the sheep-farmer, looked to Lucy to manage the household after his mother's death ; until at last he represented to her that, seeing that she was acting the part of his housewife, it would be better if she became so altogether. Mother Theresa, whose mind at that time was not impaired, did not oppose the marriage, seeing that Sister Lucy would have returned to secular life without any scandal had she been but a few months younger at the time of the dissolution of the nunnery. Accordingly, about a year after the death of old Dame Holdworthy Lucy became the wife of her son, a wandering friar acting as priest on the occasion. But no sooner did the event become known than the neighbours began to treat her with scorn and contempt ; which when Goodman Holdworthy knew, he packed up his household goods, and removed with Lucy one dark night to the lonely house on the heath where Cecily found her.

This was the tale that met Cecily's ears, and thus she found herself in the society of one whom, by education and habit, she was inclined to regard as a fallen angel.

"And are you happy?" she asked.

"Happy!" was the reply ; "only too happy. But I know not how I come to be so, for I know that everything I hold dear is linked to me by the feeblest thread. Any informer

might bring persecution upon us, and my pleasant home might be exchanged for a loathsome prison. But I try to forget that, for my husband is very good to me; and we have two sweet children, and God's blessed air and sunshine, and all we need."

"But these are perishable and earthly blessings," said Cecily. "Do you never fear lest in choosing these you have lost a higher bliss?"

"Some such fears I once had," answered Lucy. "But you know I never had a true vocation; and this Mother Theresa knew, and so she granted me her dispensation as far as she could give it. Since that time I have come to learn some things I never knew before; and now I know that it was God's will for me that I should learn to love him best, and with a more thankful heart, by being a good man's wife, and training these little angels for heaven."

"A good man?" said Cecily in a questioning tone.

"Ah! I see you wonder at it," said Lucy. "You do not think that a good man would take for his wife one who was vowed to a religious life. But my husband *is* a good man," she continued with energy; "a better man than any priest or confessor I ever knew. The fathers at St. Wennon's taught him to read when he was a boy, and since then he has read for himself in God's own Book; and there he found how everything at first was made for man's happiness, and how it was provided that God's creatures should be drawn to love him by having thankful hearts and by helping one another, not by being shut up in monasteries and convents as the priests would have it. And so my husband believes that all such vows are against the holy will of God; and being thus made in ignorance, and under a delusion of Satan, should never be held to be binding."

Cecily was startled by the boldness of her language ; and yet her own faith in the authority of the priesthood had been so much shaken, that she entered into no argument, but only said,—

“Have you ever thought how you could die in such a faith?”

“I have often thought of it,” said Lucy. “Even when your footstep sounded at the door, I knew not but it might be the coming of the persecutors to take me. And when my husband leaves me in the morning, as he often must do, for many hours, he kisses me in parting, and says, ‘Remember, we know not how we shall meet again. Let us watch and be ready ; and if not here, let us meet in paradise.’”

“And how can you have this hope?” asked Cecily.

“Because,” said Lucy, “I no longer pray to saint or angel, but to One who has given Himself for me, and who I know will not forsake me in the darkest hour. And so I take what he sends on earth, knowing that all his blessings are but revelations of himself ; and if I die, it will only be an unveiling of himself. You see, Cecily dear, the priests never taught us to know him and to love him, but they sought to hide him, and so I never really knew him or really loved him. Now all is changed.”

Cecily was silent, and after a time she rose to go, saying, “May I come again?”

“Surely,” said Lucy ; “but yet with care. For the sake of my husband and the little ones, I must not bring danger upon their heads.”

“Do not fear me,” said Cecily. “I would not harm you.”

On her return to the manor-house, she was in some doubt whether it would be expedient to tell Evelyn of the discovery

she had made ; but on the whole she resolved not to do so,—at least, for the present,—fearing lest any harm might befall the family into whose privacy she had so unexpectedly intruded herself.

She thought much of the old abbess and her recognition of herself, and she resolved that, should her stay at Pendower be much further prolonged, she would take another opportunity of visiting the dwellers on the lonely heath. And as the year waned she more than once found herself there ; and always left Lucy with the impression that, so far from condemning her, she was nearer to heaven than herself ; and she almost envied her for the clearness and simplicity of a faith which seemed to have forsaken her own soul.

Evelyn meanwhile pursued her own manner of life ; but her mind was not free from care. Constantly she was disturbed by the consciousness that those estates to which so much of her time was devoted were not rightfully her husband's ; and she chafed and fretted at his long detention on foreign service, feeling that, were he once more at her side, she would spare no entreaty to induce him to make restitution of them to her friend. Still time sped away, and Sir Ralph came not. She was not of a suspicious or jealous disposition, but sometimes the thoughts would occur to her mind that he might have come if he would,—that possibly some foreign lady had become her rival in his affections, and prevented him from using the influence he possessed at court to procure his recall.

These thoughts, however, she kept in her own bosom, and did all that kindness could suggest to prevent Cecily's residence under her roof being irksome.

Thus the year passed, and news came from the court of plots and conspiracies, of arrests and executions ; and all the while

the king's health declined, until one January morning, in the gray dawn, a letter was put into Lady Oldcastle's hand, tied with a broad black ribbon, to tell her that King Henry was dead.

Every day the great bell tolled in the church-tower by Evelyn's command, but no priest could be found to sing masses for his soul ; and the common people gathered round the ale-house fire, and debated whether so great a king would be able to escape from purgatory without the help of a priest ; and as the snow fell heavily outside, one whispered to another, and wondered what the end of these things would be.

"Didn't I tell 'ee," said one, "that a curse was on the land ? And it all came of casting down the blessed Mary and robbing her shrine. We live like swine, and die like dogs, with no one to shrive us or speed our souls to the other world. And that's all the doings of the king that was ; and now, from what they tell, it's like to be worse before it's better."

"Ay," responded another aged grumbler, "from worse to worse. 'Twere bad enough when the priests took all the land to themselves. I've heard my father tell of the good old times when the Pendowers ruled their own. I've no love for the priests, always grubbing and grasping at what they can get ; but I've less love for the foreign popinjay that the king sent down here, and if it weren't for the pretty lady his wife, me-thinks he'd have met with his deserts before now."

"Hist, neighbour, hist !" said another. "The times were always bad with you, and maybe now they're going to mend."

"Time they should," growled the other ; "or I shall never live to see it."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE NEW VICAR OF ST. EDEL'S.



SOLEMN hush prevailed in the remote part of the kingdom in which St. Edel's was situated; and though rumour was busy with a thousand tongues, yet, as one day's report was generally contradicted by the next, no one knew what to believe concerning the great events that were passing in the world where kings and princes were playing out their parts.

The quiet country-people ploughed, and sowed, and laboured for bread, unknowing and unheeding the anxieties and perplexities that beset the path of those who were to be the rulers of the nation during the young king's minority.

The only event of importance to the simple villagers that took place at this juncture, was the death of the old vicar of St. Edel's. By many this loss was severely felt. He was an aged man, and had seen the present generation grow up, and had watched over them from their baptism. His hand was always open to relieve their temporal necessities; and keeping aloof from the controversies of the day, he had ministered to their souls according to his light. Of late years his age and infirmities had prevented his influence from being much felt; but when he was laid in his grave, his people were not backward in

showing respect to his memory, and many prayers were offered for the repose of his soul.

"And now," said the squire to Dame Vivian, on his return from the funeral, "what is to be next? They say the king's uncle has been first created Duke of Somerset, and is now my Lord Protector. From having too many clergy, it seems now we shall have too few. I hear that in London and all the great towns the priests are putting off their old opinions with their winter clothes; the very churches are stripped of the images of the saints, and new white-lime hides the pictures on the walls. My Lord Protector and Archbishop Cranmer have the training of the young king, and between them they will do their best to set up the new religion on the ruins of the old."

"The old was good enough for me," said Dame Vivian. "Would God it had lasted our time!"

"The new religion would be better than no religion, and that is what it is like to be in these country places," said the squire. "If Edmund had been here now, he might have been ordained in old Father Andrew's place. Our family have long had a voice in the appointment, but now that the Priory of St. Wennon has lapsed to the crown, doubtless my Lord of Canterbury will see to it that the new vicar shall teach according to the new learning."

"Alas!" said Dame Vivian, "Edmund will never make up his mind to settle at home—any way, not while Cecily is at hand."

"And why not?" asked the squire. "They say now the law will be, that priests shall have wives. If Edmund has really made up his mind that the new religion is best, he might marry Cecily, and be the comfort and prop of our old age!"

"Edmund a priest, and marry Cecily!" said Dame Vivian,

her eyes flashing with indignation. "Surely you would not have such a scandal befall us! But it is not worth talking of," she added; "for, in the first place, Edmund is not here; and, in the second, I know Cecily too well to think she would thus disgrace herself."

"For the matter of that," returned the squire, "I have found out that the Apostle Peter had a wife; so why not my son, if he fancied one? But, as you say, Edmund is not here, and in the meantime it appears there is no priest either old or new."

With the spring, however, new life came to the squire and Dame Vivian with the return of their eldest son.

Quite unexpectedly, and with no note of warning, early one evening Hugh rode into the courtyard. Late into the night he sat up with his parents, and told them how strangely events had followed one another in the great world in which he had been living. How, only two months after the death of King Henry, the French king, Francis I., had followed him to the tomb. How the emperor, by his intrigues and bribes, had sown disunion among the German princes; and only a few weeks ago had fallen upon the army of the Protestant Alliance at Mühlberg, in the dead of night, had completely routed it, and taken the elector prisoner, together with many officers of note, and Hugh's two brothers, who were volunteers in the German army.

"It was well for them," said Hugh, "that the English ambassador was not far off, and that it so happened that I was with him at the time, and was able to negotiate for their liberty, otherwise they might at this moment have been the victims of Spanish cruelty in the Inquisition. However, considering their youth, and that they were the subjects of 'his good brother,' his majesty the emperor was pleased to let them go

free ; only binding them with a pledge not to bear arms against the empire or any of its allies for the space of ten years."

"And where are the poor boys now?" asked Dame Vivian. "How came it that they did not return with you?"

"I had heard," said Hugh, "that more forts were to be built to secure Boulogne ; and as our brother, Sir Ralph, was in high command there, I thought they might find some enterprise under him which would engage them for the present ; for they are nothing daunted by the misfortune that befell them, but are longing to be where there is fighting."

"How should there be fighting at Boulogne, seeing that it is a time of peace?" asked the squire.

"Men say that he who was the dauphin, and now is king, will not wait long to pick a quarrel with England, and recover Boulogne, if he may, by force of arms."

"Alas, for our country!" said the squire. "Never was peace so much needed within and without, and never did it seem so far off."

"Truly," Hugh replied, "my Lord Protector has enough on his hands ; for there is the Scottish war, with the French helping the Scots : and this, indeed, is why you see me here. I came but to muster a few men, and then march northwards to join the army with all convenient dispatch."

"So soon!" said Dame Vivian. "It had been better not to come at all, than to come and go thus in haste. And yet, not so," she added, repenting her words ere they were spoken. "It is good to see you, and know you are doing your duty and serving your country. But where is Edmund? Why does he stay in foreign lands?"

"Edmund is now at Geneva, studying with foreign divines. He waits to return until some perfect state of things shall be in

England ; never thinking that this perfection is only in his own brain, and that it would at least be more manful to strive to bring it about, than to waste the prime of his days wandering from teacher to teacher."

"And our friend Theodore?" asked the squire.

"Theodore is in London with his Grace of Canterbury ; and his mind is set on becoming a priest, after some sort of new fashion devised by the duke and the party of progress."

"A priest," said the squire thoughtfully. "Think you he would come here and take charge of this flock in the wilderness, who are untended by any shepherd? The fathers of St. Wennon's are all scattered to the winds, and they will appoint no more vicars ; but doubtless their rights remain with the crown, as the possessor of their lands."

"He might be willing to come," said Hugh ; "but he will be no priest after the ancient fashion ; though I know not how he will live, for the fathers gave their vicar but small pay, trusting to his diligence in saying masses and remitting sins to make up, with such-like fees, for the tithes they took to themselves."

"He shall never want for anything as long as I have aught to give," said the squire ; "and you may speak for yourself, Hugh. But truly, I would he were here ; for methinks times are changing, and there are some among the followers of the new learning who care for the next world more than this, and for men's souls more than their bodies—and among such, I take it, is Master Theodore."

"Truly he is," said Hugh ; "and, what is more, he would adventure his life for his faith—as he has, indeed, often done. But men's ways of thinking are changing fast. What say you to this, for example : that my Lord of Canterbury publicly ate meat during Lent?"

"Ate meat!" almost screamed Dame Vivian. "What is the world coming to, when a reverend archbishop thus provokes the wrath of the Almighty?"

"Theodore would say, 'How do you know that it is the will of the Almighty that men should eat no meat in Lent?'" Hugh replied. "And you would doubtless answer, 'Because the priests taught me so.' And yet, for all that, the priests may be wrong, for, he would say, it is nowhere written in Scripture that fish is more holy than meat; indeed, it may be so prepared as to minister more to the carnal appetite. Edmund would go further, and say, 'What is Lent? Nothing but an ordinance of man! Away with it altogether!'"

Dame Vivian was inexpressibly shocked; but the squire said, "Young blood! young blood! In haste to pull down, but not seeing how hard to build up! Methinks the judgment of Theodore is a riper one!"

"He thinks much of Archbishop Cranmer, and more still of Father Latimer, the Bishop of Worcester that was. Theodore was telling me how his own father knew Latimer in early days."

"Theodore has never spoken of his father to me by name," said the squire.

"Nor to me either, until the death of the late king," said Hugh; "and then one evening, when the snow was falling heavily, and we were waiting for a vessel bound to England in a hostelry on the French coast, his heart turned to me, and he told me all. How his father was a gentleman of Leicestershire, Arundel by name. And how, in the early days of King Henry, he was taken and burned, and all his estates confiscated, because he would not say that the substance of the Lord's body was present in the bread at the blessed Sacrament, or his blood in the wine; moreover, a copy of Wickliffe's translation of the

Scriptures was found in his possession, which he took much pleasure in reading, and which was burned on his funeral pile. It was Bishop Tunstall who had him clapped into prison and burned ; and he had his eye upon Theodore ever after, who quickly fell under suspicion, having been trained by his father to hold the same heresies."

"But are there not a Bonner and a Gardiner, even now, but too ready to do him an evil turn?" asked the squire.

"Ready enough, no doubt," answered Hugh ; "but for the present their wings are clipped, and my Lord Cranmer, with his uncle the duke, are training the young king to think with them. Should he live to govern the realm in his own name, England will see another ordering of affairs in Church and State!"

"And if not?" said the squire.

"Then, in my opinion," said Hugh, "the rightful heir will be the Princess Mary ; and should she be our queen, then shall we have back the slaying and burning, the harrying and wasting of the people, and no man will dare to say his soul is his own. She will but have the name of queen, for the pope and the priests will be let loose in the land."

"But why should this be?" asked Dame Vivian. "England was governed surely and safely when the Holy Father was the head in the Church, and the priests ruled in religion. Now all men think they know better than their teachers, and the land is distraught with wild and strange fancies."

"It *was* surely a strong government which set forth that it held the keys of heaven," said Hugh. "And profitable withal, seeing that by this world's lucre entrance could be obtained into the courts above : so was this world linked to the next by golden fetters, of which the Church held the key. Such power for time and eternity was worth striking a blow for ; and what are a few

lives more or less to the priests, when weighed in the balance with their gains?"

"I know not," said Dame Vivian; "but I see the fruits of the old teaching were peace and good order, and of the new, division and misrule."

"You see no fruits yet, wife," said the squire, "but such as spring from the old seed, fostered by ignorance and neglect. I would fain sow some sound seed, and let it be tended by a diligent hand, and maybe our children's children shall reap the harvest."

"And I," said Hugh, "am of my father's mind; though I fear me the enemy will be back on us and root it out ere ever it is well set. The king's grace is but a sickly child."

"And yet," said the squire, "I find it written that in the first sowing we hear of in Holy Writ the harvest was speedy and plenteous, and that in spite of the winnowing of persecution which proved the grain. Thus it may be with us; and truly we need refining fires."

"There is one," said Dame Vivian after a pause, "of whom you have said but little,—our son-in-law, Sir Ralph. When think you our Evelyn will see him back again?"

Hugh's brow grew cloudy, and he answered shortly, "Either when Boulogne is taken by the French, or when the terms of the treaty by which we hold it are fulfilled."

"But that was for so many years, that Evelyn's hair may be turning gray ere ever her lord return," said her mother.

"It may be so," said Hugh. "Our brother is a brave soldier, and his heart is in his calling. If Evelyn can content herself, it may be that things are best as they are."

"What would you say of Sir Ralph? Nought that is evil, I trust," said the squire.

"No evil that will not bear the light," said Hugh; "only

men say that his temper is violent and unforgiving, and I thought if ever Evelyn crossed his humour trouble might come, seeing that he loves not our country, and takes no delight in the quiet ways of country-folk."

The squire sighed, and said, "What is done cannot be undone; our child has borne transplanting bravely, but she has been more of a widow than a wife."

Dame Vivian wiped away a tear, but asked no more questions.

In a very few days Hugh took his departure for the north, and shared the glories of the protector's first Scottish campaign; and on his return to London he did not forget to see Theodore, and to open to him his father's project. At first there was some hesitation in Theodore's manner, and he said, "But your own brother Edmund! Why not invite him to minister among you?"

To which Hugh replied, "Edmund has no certainty himself; how then can he be a leader of men in such times as the present?"

"And yet," said Theodore, "his mind is opening fast. It seemed to me, when I saw him last, that it was only active service that he needed, to turn his ideas into principles and his opinions into convictions."

"For all that," said Hugh, "I do not think St. Edel's is the fitting post for him. Why reopen a wound which is well-nigh healed? You knew his affection for Cecily, and I suppose you know that she never will return it?"

"I knew of the one, but I know not why she never should return it," said Theodore.

"You do not, then, scout the idea of a married priest?" Hugh asked.

"I judge no one," said Theodore; "yet the present does not seem to me a time for marrying and giving in marriage. The heavenly Bridegroom is very near to all of us, but the more a man moves in the fore-front of the battle the likelier it is his Lord may call him home; therefore, for myself, I would not entangle myself with more of the ties of life than needs must."

"I know that Cecily would say much more than that, even if her heart were drawn towards Edmund, which I am sure it is not," Hugh replied. "Even my mother started with amazement and dread, when she heard that the time was approaching when such things would be allowed."

"It is hard to say what the law of man will or will not allow," Theodore replied. "So much has been added to the simple and beautiful divine law by human ingenuity, that it is only by degrees that truth is unveiled; and men's eyes have so long been holden, that they do not know her majesty when they see her."

"It may be as you say," said Hugh. "I myself can see the disease more plainly than the remedy. But why not come to St. Edel's for a time, and see what you can do for us there?"

"There is no place on earth in which I would sooner begin my ministry; and yet I doubt the wisdom," Theodore answered musingly.

The result of the squire's proposal, backed up by Hugh's representations, eventually was, that Theodore, who had previously received ordination at the hands of Archbishop Cranmer, was licensed by the Crown to act as vicar in the Manor of St. Edel.

In the autumn of the same year Theodore returned. At first there was a strangeness that he who had gone forth from the Vivian family a nameless fugitive, and who on two separate

occasions had been indebted to them for his very life, should now return to fill the place made vacant by the flight of his persecutors ; and yet, whilst filling it in name, all felt that a great and radical change had passed over the aspect of religion in the district.

During the time that the cure had been vacant, the visitors sent by the order of the new Government had effected various changes in the outward appearance of the church, which were emblematical of the teaching which they intended should follow.

Instead of the quaint and grotesque paintings on the walls of the chancel, which had told their own story of saints and martyrs to the eyes of the congregation, whilst the ancient ceremonial was carried on, the ten commandments were emblazoned in bright colours ; and as a further protest against idolatry, various images had been displaced from their niches ; whilst above the richly-carved screen, in the place of the holy rood the king's arms were now set up, in token of the supremacy of royalty in Church as well as State.

Public instruction was also given by the reading of a homily, prepared by the archbishop and other divines who were of the same mind as himself in seeking to forward the reformation.

The uneducated wondered in silence, but the example of the squire, and the unqualified support he gave to Theodore, or "Father Arundel," as he was now called, caused these changes to be tolerated without public opposition ; and Theodore's personal influence soon made itself felt in such a way as to disarm those who were most disposed to be fractious. Still, some murmurs were heard when Father Arundel (having refused to perform a private mass for the soul of a departed person) preached a sermon on holiness in the present life as the only

evidence of being prepared for the next, and announced his entire disbelief in purgatory, and masses celebrated here for the delivery of unhappy souls.

"We shall see," said they, "how this fine preacher will fare when pay-day comes, and all the tithes go to the King, and no fees come in for saying masses or compounding for sin."

But when pay-day came Father Arundel merely observed that he was content with receiving such a portion of the tithes as the monks had allotted for the payment of their vicar; yet, seeing that this provision was barely sufficient to provide the necessaries of life, and that his flock were for the most part but humble folk, he would not be chargeable to them in their poverty, but, following the example of the great Apostle Paul, he would reside in the glebe house, and cultivate a portion of the glebe land with his own hands, until such time as the Government should see fit to restore some such portion of the real charge as might be suitable for the maintenance of a resident pastor.

The squire fumed and chafed, and said it was never his intention that Theodore should be thus scurvily treated, but that bed and board should be his at the Manor-house. This, however, Theodore firmly resisted, saying that in good time all would be righted, and meanwhile he was best where he was. And so it was, that while Parliament was busy repealing all the persecuting laws of the previous reign, Theodore settled himself as the messenger of peace and good tidings in the midst of the Cornish wilds.

CHAPTER XIV.

OLD TIMES AND NEW.



THE work of reform had not meanwhile had so successful a beginning at Pendower as at St. Edel's.

The aged monk who remained as the only representative of the ancient faith, was at no pains to make the ordinances of the new Government acceptable to the people. He either could not or would not read in English the portions of Scripture that were now prescribed for the instruction of the people ; the homilies were far beyond his powers ; and his preaching, when he did preach, was of a sort to satisfy nobody.

Prudence forbade him to enlarge upon those articles of faith which had formed the principal theme of his discourses in former times ; for, judging the new order of things by the old, he considered that the same Parliament which now was making heresy lawful, would shortly proceed to inflict the same penalties on the followers of the old religion as, not much more than a year ago, had fallen on the heads of the party now in power. Moreover, the knowledge that even the high position of the Bishops of London and Winchester had not saved them from imprisonment, acted with a very restraining power upon his words.

This kind of negative compliance with the injunctions of the

ruling powers was very far from satisfying the zeal of those who, like Farmer Holdworthy, had advanced with the advancing wave of religious thought and feeling, and felt the old system to be one of spiritual starvation.

Still less did it please the ignorant, the superstitious, and those who, from old association, were still sincerely attached to the ancient faith; and when, in the year following the appointment of Theodore to be Vicar of St. Edel's, still further innovations were proclaimed, the murmurs of the country grumblers found a voice in open complaints and disaffection.

"What!" said one, "shall the most sacred mystery of all be tampered with? Shall the priest have no power to offer the sacrifice which redeems souls from purgatory?"

"Of what use is a priest, then," asked another, "if not to absolve us from sin? Why confess, if our souls are not to be freed?"

"How shall we be preserved from the influences of evil spirits," said a third, "if there is to be no sprinkling of holy water, and if the priest can neither bless nor curse?"

And from the inmost hearts of multitudes arose the cry, "How shall we win heaven when we die? If fastings, pilgrimages, and penances are of no avail, what then? Shall we die in our sins?"

Cecily at this time saw a great deal of the peasantry in the neighbourhood of Pendower, and when such remarks were made to her, with an inward heartache she recoiled from the encounter. Too truly they represented the conflict that was going on in her own mind, and she could but sympathize with the complaints, and confess that she had no answer to give to these perplexities. It was true that the more she studied the English Bible, the more she became aware how much there

was in the opinions of the reformers that was in accordance with what she there read ; but what was the worth of her opinion, young and unlearned as she was ? How could she set it up against the voice of the Universal Church ? The reformers were but a handful of men as compared with the learned of all ages. To whom then could she turn for assistance ?

Instinctively she thought of Theodore as the only person who would understand or be patient with her difficulties ; but she had only seen him at rare intervals since his establishment at St. Edel's ; and once she had fancied that when Evelyn and herself were at the Hall, he had rather shunned than courted their society. She had nerved herself, when they first met, to relate how she had been compelled to give up his book ; when he only said that the squire had restored it to him, and that he should hold it as a loan, to be given back to her whenever her conscience would allow her to resume the study of it.

Evelyn was full of anxiety at the responsible position in which she was placed, not knowing what part her lord would take at the present crisis, and fearful lest she should commit herself to any course of action that would be displeasing to him.

"I could almost find it in my heart to wish that Boulogne were taken by the enemy," said she one summer evening to Cecily, as they were sitting in the convent-garden, under the shadow of the elms.

Cecily looked at her compassionately, and said,—

"Your dream of happiness was indeed a short one, my Evelyn ; but yet your path in life is clear. How useful you are to Sir Ralph ! Whilst I—;" and she sighed.

"If I could only know that what I am doing he approves

of," Evelyn continued. "There are some who say that so much more could be made of the estate if the common land were enclosed and made into sheep runs, instead of being let to the smaller tenants. But then, what would become of the poor? They would not have work sufficient to keep them in food and clothing."

"That is what your father says," replied Cecily. "His estate and yours are about the only ones where the people still are faithful to their landlords. Elsewhere the land is ripe for a rising."

"Yes," said Evelyn, "it must be best as it is; only I hope my lord will be pleased. And I am not so sure that after all the people are so peaceful as it seems. Listen to that." And in the quiet of the evening were heard confused and angry voices, very discordant with the harmony of nature.

"As I came through the village but an hour since, one of those strange and wandering preachers was mounted on a table in the ale-house yard, haranguing the labourers as they returned from work. There were sedition and anarchy in his very look; and Giles told me how there had been riots in some part of the country, and that one of the royal commissioners has been slain; and here we are in this lonely place with no head to decide how best to act."

It was a rare thing for Cecily to hear Evelyn thus down-hearted. Generally her life was so full of occupation, that there was but little time for thought, and it had been a marvel to Cecily how easily her friend seemed to have accommodated herself to the peculiar circumstances of her lot.

"Surely," she said, "we have no cause for fear; we have never hurt anybody, and the people have received nothing but kindness at your hands."

"No," said Evelyn; "but I am a stranger amongst them. If they behave well, it will be for your sake, Cecily. They owe more to you and yours than to me. Sometimes I think this property will be a curse upon us all our days."

Cecily was still more surprised at Evelyn's mood, and scarcely knew how to comfort her.

"Shall we make a vow," she said, "to the Virgin, to dedicate to her what we value most, if she will bring Sir Ralph home in peace?"

"No, no, no!" said Evelyn; "the Virgin knows nothing about what is troubling me; and if she did, I am sure she would not help me until what is wrong is set right."

Then half repenting of what she had said, she added, with a forced gaiety, "Suppose we ride to St. Edal's to-morrow, and see what the old folks are doing?"

Cecily was distressed and perplexed at Evelyn's manner. She did not know whether Evelyn was referring to the appropriation of the Church lands by the king, or whether her friend was alluding to some other matter with which she was not acquainted. However, concluding that it was best to ask no questions, she agreed to her friend's proposal, hoping that the squire might be able to give his daughter the advice she needed.

In the cool of a July morning they therefore betook themselves to horse, hoping to arrive at the Hall before the time of the family breakfast. But, on their arrival, it was evident that something unusual was going on. Dame Vivian and her maids were in such high excitement, that they could scarcely stop to give the visitors their usual hearty welcome.

"Have you heard the news?" said Dame Vivian. "Have you seen your father? Go, and he will tell you all about it, for

I can scarcely tell how it has come to pass ; but Edmund is coming. He may be here at any minute."

The squire was found in his hay-field hastening the men, and giving orders that all might be in readiness to welcome his long absent son.

"Ha!" said he, when Evelyn and Cecily appeared; "just come in time to help us to receive the wanderer!"

"But tell me, father," said Evelyn, "how it all is. I see my mother looking ten years younger, and you working at your hay like a young man of twenty, and then I hear a hue and cry that Edmund is coming."

"And so he is," said the squire; "a messenger came last night to say he had arrived in England, and was following close on the courier's heels. And so your mother and I have been up with the sun to prepare to give him a welcome. Nothing could be better than your arrival. Just in the nick of time, for I was going to send after you, and I could ill spare my men from the hay."

"But where does he come from?" asked Evelyn.

"From Geneva, I believe," said the squire. "It seems that my Lord Protector has sent for some foreign divines of great note, to assist his Grace of Canterbury in some of his undertakings, and in their train Edmund has come."

He had scarcely finished speaking when they perceived Dame Vivian entering the field, leaning on the arm of a tall gentleman in foreign attire.

"Why, here he is!" said the squire, springing forward, and then hesitating.

"Is this my brother?" said Evelyn.

"Yes, to be sure," said the squire, advancing again. "Don't you see your mother's face?"

In another moment Evelyn had thrown her arms round her brother's neck with all her old impetuosity, and the squire was wringing his hand as if he never meant to let it go.

Cecily, as she lingered behind, thought their hesitation in recognizing Edmund was not strange. The years that he had spent in foreign travel had naturally aged him much ; his figure, though still slight, had stiffened and lost something of its grace ; his movements were slow and no longer impulsive, and a fixed and somewhat rigid expression had settled upon his features ; while his eye, no more restless, seemed to have a far-away expression, which, though it for a moment gave place to a kindling of joy on meeting his relations, yet relapsed into a dreamy stillness when the first excitement was over. All this Cecily observed as she slowly approached the group. Edmund startled slightly on seeing her, and looked at her with an expression of curiosity as he greeted her kindly but without emotion.

Cecily noticed the look with which he met her, and thought to herself, "If a few years have thus altered him, doubtless equally great changes have taken place in myself."

And yet it was not so altogether. The pale and silent convent-maiden had indeed developed into a fair and lovely woman, less spirit-like and unearthly in her loveliness than formerly, but not less tranquil and beautiful. It seemed as if the family life in which she had freely mingled, in drawing out her affections, had added a tenderness and a charm to all her other attractions ; and an even greater sweetness beamed from the depths of her violet eyes as she looked on the happiness of those she so much loved.

Yet, after the first salutations had been exchanged between Edmund and herself, he almost totally ignored her presence ;

and as time passed on, it became evident to all around that whatever interest she had once possessed in his eyes had now vanished, together with many traits of his character in former days, of which no trace could be found.

Edmund's arrival at Vivian Hall occasioned Theodore to spend more of his time with the family of his old pupil; but as the squire and Dame Vivian naturally claimed the largest share of their son's attention, Cecily now and then found that, owing to herself and Theodore being the only strangers present, she had opportunities of conversation with him which she might otherwise have sought in vain. And once, while speaking of the changes that were going on in the society around her, she said,—

“You cannot think how like a shipwrecked mariner I feel. All the old landmarks are taken away,—nothing seems certain, but everything is shifting and changing; and when the poor people talk to me of their troubles, and expect that I, being better educated, should be able to help them, I am tongue-tied and know not what to say. Yet I know there must be truth somewhere. Can you wonder that I look back with regret on the assurance which I feel I have lost?”

Theodore was startled at what Cecily said. He was not aware how much she had been thinking and feeling since last they had conversed together, but had, perhaps, hastily concluded that Father Cyprian's authority had reasserted its dominion over her thinking powers.

“You speak of assurance lost,” he said, “and truly there are many mysteries concerning which no certainty can be obtained in this life; but yet it seems to me that the great verities of our salvation are too plainly taught in Scripture for any one to miss them who diligently uses his Bible as his guide to heaven”

"But to me it appears presumption to set up myself above the opinion of that Holy and Universal Church in which I have been educated ; therefore, when I see a truth in Scripture which seems at variance with what I have been taught, I feel that I must be somehow wrong. You cannot think how hard it is, after having been in leading-strings all my life, to be left utterly without support."

"With respect to what you said at first," said Theodore, "I think you ought to know that there is absolutely no such thing as a visible Universal Church in which all the articles of belief are the same, because such an idea immediately produces great confusion of thought. That Church in which you were educated is only universal in the western countries of Europe. In the east there is a large company of believers who might equally claim to be universal, but who differ from the Western Church in many points of doctrine. You require, therefore, a surer test for truth than an assumption of universality."

"You are not consolatory," said Cecily ; "you only show me more of my own ignorance."

"And yet I would be consolatory," said Theodore , "for I do believe that the way of repentance and the life through faith are so clearly taught in the Word of God, that any one who *will* do the one shall experience the other, and may claim the promise of the Holy Spirit to win his way to fuller light."

"And this without the intervention of a priest ?"

"Certainly, as regards practical religion. If you study the doctrine of repentance as revealed in Scripture, you cannot fail to be struck with the difference between the revelation of God and what has been taught by man in these later ages of the world. The priests would say, 'Do penance, mortify the body, make vows and bring gifts to the Virgin, or to your patron

saint, and you will be forgiven.' The Divine Teacher would rather say, 'Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts;' and if the sinner, feeling his helplessness, says, 'I cannot,' he will find it written in the New Testament, 'The Spirit helpeth our infirmities.'"

"You do not say, then, as some are teaching now, that all has been done for us; and therefore we need do nothing ourselves, but may live as we list?" Cecily asked.

"I do not find it so written," Theodore replied; "and I take it that all such preaching proceeds from the haste of those would-be teachers who have taken no time to compare scripture with scripture, and are therefore as much to be distrusted as the priests themselves, seeing their errors have the same root. Both think they have found a way whereby the pleasures of sin may be enjoyed in this life and the soul saved in the next."

"But, after all," said Cecily, "how will this studying of Scripture be available for the poor and the unlearned?"

"Ah! there," said Theodore, "you have come to the real difficulty; for darkness has overspread the land to such an extent that nothing short of a miracle can remove the evil in our day. And yet, methinks, in this new art of printing, whereby books are multiplied with such marvellous speed, I seem to see the beginning of the cure; and I can imagine that, in the dim years that are coming, books may be found in the poor man's cottage as well as in the library of the learned; ay, that every man, woman, and child may read for themselves the best Book of all."

"Certainly, certainly," said Edmund, breaking into the conversation. "The light is even now shining far and wide; and the people, having known it, will never suffer darkness and the tyranny of the priests to keep them down again."

"We cannot say, 'Never,'" Theodore replied. "If those who received the truth from the hands of apostles could let it pass from their grasp, what delusions may not even now overspread the land through the power of the Evil One. But what think you of the new work that the bishops have in hand?"

"You mean the Book of Common Prayer, I suppose," said Edmund. "It is well thought of, if only well enough carried out; but some of the bishops are yet Popish in their hearts, and the fear is lest the others should not go far enough. The sin of idolatry has so far eaten into the old service-book, that, to my mind, it were easier to write one anew than reform the old."

"And yet, if the royal commissioners have grace to perform their task with wisdom, and to purge away the leaven that has crept into our public services during the ages of ignorance and corruption, it were a noble task, in my judgment, to seek for the buried treasures that have been so long hidden. Can we, in these days, expect to improve upon the devotions of men whose love never grew cold, and who testified to their faith with their life-blood?"

"I know not," said Edmund carelessly. "Yet Peter Martyr and others who have come over to advise with the English divines, speak as you do. It may be good for the weaker brethren that forms of prayer should be used; and if so, these may be as well as any. I saw a copy of part of the draft of the proposed Book of Common Prayer as it will be presented to Parliament at their next session, and, certainly, so far they had done their work well; having expurgated all prayers to the Virgin and saints, with all stories and legends and vain repetitions; and provision is made for the public reading of Scripture.

The archbishop also is busy with a Catechism for the teaching of the young concerning their faith and duty."

"You see," said Theodore, turning to Cecily, "our work at this time is patience, and in due season order will spring out of confusion. In all those deeper matters of controversy which are now obscured by such dark mists, our rulers are striving to find their way to the opinions of the godly in earliest times, when apostles, or those who received the truth at their hands, were yet living; and when these truths are thus found and tried with the touchstone of the blessed Word, then must they train up teachers who shall go forth as stewards of these holy mysteries, who shall instruct the people over the length and the breadth of the land."

"You do not expect, then, that each man shall find out all truth for himself?" asked Cecily.

"There again," said Theodore, "I would only refer you to Scripture, where you will find provision made for the teaching of the people by ordained ministers, endowed with authority to carry the gospel to every creature. By their means God's remission of sins through the blood of atonement is effectually pronounced, and, as in apostolic days, is carried home to the conscience. What you will *not* find is the power, arrogated to themselves by the priests, of forgiving sins at their own discretion, and of reproducing and offering afresh the sacrifice of the body of Christ. Search for yourself, and see if the words I speak are the words of truth."

The conversation had, by degrees, become so interesting to all, that when Theodore finished speaking he found that the squire and Dame Vivian had moved towards the oriel, where he had been sitting apart with Cecily when it had been opened by her inquiry.

Dame Vivian sighed, and cast up her eyes as though inexpressibly shocked, while the squire looked thoughtful, and said,—

“In this age of the world we seem to live so fast, changes follow one another so quickly, that I can scarce keep pace with them, and I have my doubts whether the country is ripe for them. It is well that my lords of Winchester and of London are muzzled, or maybe their barking would rouse up such a following of the lovers of the old faith, that it would be beyond my Lord Protector’s power to allay the storm!”

“But all this time we hear nothing of Edmund’s plans,” said Evelyn.

“My plans are soon told, because I have none clearly laid out,” said Edmund. “I must practise that patience of which Theodore was speaking just now, until such time as the Book of Common Prayer is put forth by the authority of Parliament, and then I shall see whether I can take service in the Church of England, or whether one of the Reformed Churches abroad will better suit my views. I have my doubts that there are too many time-servers about the duke for the reform to be sweeping and thorough.”

“And meanwhile?” continued Evelyn.

“Meanwhile I shall attend the public disputations that are being carried on at the English universities. I shall visit London, where many of my foreign friends are now staying, and hear the debates when Parliament opens, and also the sermons of the great preachers at Paul’s Cross. I could not settle down, as Theodore is doing, amongst farmers and clodhoppers: I might be a licensed preacher, and travel from place to place to bear testimony to the truth; but just as Hugh feels his spirit stir within him at the trumpet-call to battle, so must my

post be ever in the vanguard of the conflict that is now going on, where mind is measured with mind, and the contest is for truth."

"Some fight one way, and some another," said the squire, who could not help fancying he perceived some assumption of spiritual superiority in Edmund's remark. "For my own part, in the long run I would back doing against talking; and the religion nine-tenths of the world want is a very homely one. If it were not for our friend here, we poor clodhoppers should be going backward instead of forward."

"As we are doing at Pendower," said Evelyn. "Really, if it were not for our presence at the Manor-house, and for Cecily, who is ever tending the poor as if they were her own children, our village would be as seditious as any in the country."

"That makes just the difference," said the squire; "you *are* there, and keep up the household. And though your husband is absent, every one knows that it is on the king's service, and that he is not grinding his tenants to spend the money on his own luxuries, as is the case where the people are disaffected. So keep up a brave heart, and may Heaven send him back to you soon."

"Well, father, if you think I am acting for the best, I will hold on," said Evelyn.

CHAPTER XV.

THE NEW BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER.



LADY OLDCASTLE returned to Pendower, taking Cecily with her, a few days after the arrival of her brother Edmund. Away from home and its pursuits, she was restless and anxious. The whole aspect of the religious and political life of England had so completely changed since Sir Ralph's departure, and the clash of party strife had become so bitter, that she felt unequal to coming to any decision for herself, and was very much guided by the opinion of her father as to the best manner of meeting it.

One comfort she had in the midst of her anxieties was, that persecution had entirely ceased, for the sake of religion ; the worst that happened to the two Papal Bishops of London and Winchester being to be held in confinement at the pleasure of the Council, lest their influence should prevail to counteract the reforms which now were determined on. She was therefore assured that private individuals might hold what opinions seemed good to them.

As this persuasion became generally known and understood, Cecily thought she might safely tell her of the discovery she had made concerning Mother Theresa and Sister Lucy, now the wife of John Holdworthy ; but, to her surprise, Evelyn

evinced no eagerness to see again her kinswoman, as Mother Theresa was in a remote degree, but rather shrank from all allusions to the former days of the religious house, as if in some way painful to her.

But an event of public interest occurred a few months later, which was fraught with very important results to the people everywhere, and for the first time brought Evelyn into connection with the Holdworthys; and this was the publication of the new English Liturgy.

Edmund had remained at St. Edel's until the session of Parliament opened, which was to decide many points about the outward form of religion in the country; but as soon as the debates on these subjects commenced, he betook himself to London, keeping his family informed by letter of the tendency of the public mind.

At one time he wrote in a very desponding strain. Fasting on certain days was still to be enforced, he wrote, by certain penalties of the law; the reason whereof was a worldly and carnal one enough in his opinion—"that flesh might be saved to the country, and the fishing trade protected:" in which enactment, he observed, we see nothing of the old leaven, but too much of the time-serving and faithless spirit which now overspreads the country.

The next letter was in a more cheerful strain. Cranmer, he wrote, had come out on the Protestant side, and abjured the Romish and Lutheran heresies on the doctrine of the Lord's Supper, and had carried many of the bishops with him; and the orders that had been previously announced that the laity should partake of the wine equally with the bread were enforced, as also that they should be no longer simple spectators, but partakers whenever the celebration of the Lord's Supper took

place. Notwithstanding these great and encouraging changes, when all appeared settled, and the Act of Parliament had become law, Edmund wrote that the reform had not gone far enough to please him, and that he was going to Cambridge to hear what Master Ridley had to say in his public disputations, before he decided on his future career.

The changes, however, which had not gone far enough for Edmund, had gone very much too far for some of Evelyn's neighbours; and as the year advanced, the reports diligently circulated by wandering monks and friars, to the disparagement of the work of the archbishop and the other royal commissioners, excited the minds of the simple country folk, so that when the day came for first using the English Liturgy instead of the Mass, they were fully possessed with the idea that what they were going to hear would be heathenish and profane in the extreme.

It was on a Whitsunday morning that the new compilation was first to run the gauntlet of public opinion. Licensed preachers, of approved orthodoxy according to the new standard of uniformity, were sent by the Council to inaugurate the new state of things in many parishes where it was supposed the clergy were disaffected; especially in the western counties, where the conservative tendency of the people caused the outcry to be the loudest. Through Theodore's influence at headquarters, one of these was sent to Pendower; and Evelyn hoped that the explanations and admonitions of a godly man might allay the rising discontent, and tend to calm the minds of the parishioners, since, whatever men might think or say, it was useless to fret and chafe against what had now become law by the will of the nation as represented by Parliament.

It had been a cold and late spring; but Whitsunday opened

in bright sunshine, and with all the brilliance of early summer. Evelyn resolved that, instead of entering the church by the nuns' way, she would walk through the churchyard, and endeavour, by her presence, to assist the cause of order amongst the idle loiterers who were sure to be attracted by the rumour of any fresh excitement. So, accompanied by Cecily, she walked down the avenue of stately trees which led from the old nunnery to the village. The air was laden with sweet scents from the blossoming shrubs, which, after a night of rain, were giving forth their most fragrant odours. The birds were twittering to their young ones, and tempting them forth to bask in the warm rays of the long-absent sun. All nature was rejoicing in a day of rest and gladness, after a period when the storms from the Atlantic had been unusually wild and rough. Relics of the recent gales were to be seen in the broken twigs and branches which strewed the way, and in the little rivulets which flowed by the roadside to join the larger stream in the village.

"One seems to breathe more freely on such a day as this," Evelyn remarked. "Oh, that the peace of nature might be a type of a greater peace that is coming upon our poor distracted country!"

"Let us try to think it is," said Cecily; "although, as you know, Father Arundel once said,—'Peace on earth is a gift which comes when we least expect it, and is sometimes as suddenly withheld.'"

"I have thought of late," said Evelyn, "that Father Arundel is more of an authority with you than Father Cyprian. Am I right?"

Cecily hesitated. "I do not know how to answer you," at last she replied, "and I will not break the peace of to-day with trying to think; but I know that I am greatly changed since

the time when the Bible in English was shocking to me. I even have a longing for what we are going to hear to-day. I think the idea of all praying together in the same words, and in our own language, is so very beautiful ; and I feel as if some great blessing must be given to such spiritual worship."

"You almost go beyond me now," said Evelyn. "I too like the *idea* ; but the question is whether the people are ready for such worship ? Are they not too ignorant and wicked, and is it not better that the priests should pray for them ?

"One of the things I have learned lately," said Cecily, "is, that whether people are learned or ignorant, rich or poor, their religion must be a personal religion, and cannot be done for them ; so now I am anxious to see this morning whether the new service is likely to help them—and myself also, for I am sure I need help as much as they do," she added.

By this time they were in the village, and could see a stream of people approaching the church-path from every lane and by-way. There were farmers and working men, fishermen from the coast ; and even many women, bringing their children with them because they would not be left behind. In the inn-yard which they left on their right were many heavy waggons, stained with the mire they had pulled through on the heavy roads ; these had evidently brought whole families from the country beyond. Then there were stout horses with pillions, and yeomen and their wives in gay holiday attire riding upon them, all thronging towards the church, where the bells were chiming sweetly above the confused murmur of voices.

"I never saw such a gathering of people on the highest festival," said Evelyn.

Cecily was going to reply, when she touched Evelyn and pointed out John Holdworthy, who was just then assisting his

wife to dismount from her pillion, at the tall steps beside the lych-gate.

"There are the Holdworthys," she whispered.

Evelyn looked towards them, and observed that, whereas everyone else had found some friend to give them a greeting on their arrival, the Holdworthys stood quite alone, all their neighbours withdrawing from their proximity as if they could communicate some infectious disease. A sudden sense of injustice fired up Evelyn's nature, and instead of passing them as she walked through the churchyard with the nod and smile with which she recognized her own tenants, she held out her hand to Lucy Holdworthy, and drawing it upon her own arm, she led her into the church, whilst Cecily followed with John Holdworthy.

The church was already half full, and by the time the bells ceased chiming the ancient structure was completely filled. All the congregation were gazing towards the altar; the labourers in their clean smocks, at the further end of the church, stood upon the seats gaping with open mouths as well as eyes, as if anxious not to lose anything of the spectacle which they were expecting.

No such display, however, took place; but a plain-looking man, a stranger to all present, accompanied the vicar into the church, and shortly took his place in the pulpit, simply attired in his surplice. In a few brief words he entreated the congregation to join him with their hearts and voices as far as they were able in the devotions of the day, and then saying, "Let us pray," in a clear and audible voice he repeated the Lord's Prayer. Two or three faint and hesitating voices accompanied his own; but to most persons in that congregation this prayer was unknown in their own language, they having

been only accustomed to repeat the Paternoster in Latin, not knowing the meaning of the words. The service then proceeded according to the new ordering, the vicar reading the responses in English; but the congregation, having no books, and being, for the most part, unable to read, could only listen, and take in as much as they were able.

When the office for morning prayer was thus said, the preacher knelt for a short time in prayer, whilst a solemn silence prevailed in the church. The organ was hushed, for since the dissolution of the nunnery no one had been found who was competent to play it, or to train a choir. Then rising from his knees, the preacher gave out his text, in a sonorous voice, in the words of St. Paul, "What is it then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also."

In the first part of his sermon he pointed out the changes that had been made in the form of prayer that he had just been using, which he said consisted chiefly in the omission of all addresses to the Virgin Mary and the saints, and the substitution of prayers used by holy men of old, three parts of which were in the very words of Scripture itself; also, that instead of uncertain stories and legends of saints, it was now provided that the inspired words of divine truth should be systematically read for the instruction of the people; but that the greatest change of all was in the language in which the service was carried on. The preacher then, warming with his subject, proceeded to enlarge upon his text; which he did with great force and eloquence, drawing from some few of his auditors expressions of assent and approbation. The most part, however, maintained a stolid appearance of imperturbable indifference, as if to them it mattered little whether the service were in Latin or in English.

The sermon being ended and the blessing given, the preacher

went his way, as he had other duties to perform the same day. Meanwhile, the people gathered in knots in the churchyard, and as Evelyn and Cecily passed a few of the remarks caught their ear.

"Why, there was nothing to see at all ; you'll never catch me coming all this way another time just for this !" said one.

"What !" said another ; "his English was as hard as another man's Latin ; there's nothing to choose between them."

"If this is all my Lord Protector can do for us, give me back the old king and the mass-book !" said a third.

"He didn't *look* as if he'd sold himself to the devil," said a fourth ; "but there's no trusting to looks."

"It was all well enough spoken, and good enough for the king and his courtiers ; but then, we poor folk want somebody to put us straight above, and we've never the time or the wits to be studying and praying for ourselves, as he would have us."

Evelyn glanced at Cecily as they passed the last speaker, and then turning to John Holdworthy, she asked,—

"And pray, what is your opinion, Mr. Holdworthy?"

"My opinion is, that we in this country have sunk to such low depths of ignorance that we have come to love our chains ; and that if ever we get quit of them it will be by the means of such preachers as we have heard to-day, and more particularly by having them live amongst us, to instruct us, as your Master Arundel does, as I hear, at St. Edel's."

"You do not think the people will rise against the new service-book?" she asked.

"It's not unlikely they may," he replied. "There's everything in the old religion to recommend it to human nature, and the new is yet untried ; but till they've found some way to recon-

cile that with their sins, the chances are that, for the most part, the people will be against it."

"I thought the service to-day just missed being so very beautiful," said Cecily. "It failed just where I should have expected it to succeed. The people seemed to listen to it with such indifference, while to me every word was thrilling with such deep interest."

"This may have been," said John Holdworthy, "because some parts of it were already familiar to you in Latin, while to others it was as new as if it had originated with the reader."

"Possibly," said Cecily; "indeed, I did recognize some of my favourite parts of the Breviary: but suppose that those words in the mouth of the reader had arisen from the congregation as if with one heart, would it not have been like heaven?"

Lucy Holdworthy was gazing at Cecily, as she spoke, with eyes beaming with affection and sympathy, when Evelyn touched her, and said, "Will you not come and see the old place?"

She glanced at her husband, who answered hastily, "Not to-day, my lady, thank you. This is the first time that Lucy has come so far since our marriage; but you will be welcome if you will honour us with a visit when you can ride or walk so far."

"Oh, do!" said Lucy; "and let it be soon. The old mother may not be with us much longer; and she was always so fond of you."

"Well," said Evelyn hesitating, "I will try to come to-morrow."

When the morrow came, Evelyn asked Cecily to accompany her to the Holdworthys; and the morning being still fine, they took the early part of the day for their visit. Lucy was

evidently expecting them, and in the sitting-room sat the old abbess, much as when Cecily had first seen her.

"Here, mother! look here," said Lucy, leading Evelyn up to her. "Do you know your little Evelyn, your bright little rose-bud?"

But the old woman evinced no recollection of her as she had done when she first saw Cecily, for in truth the change in Evelyn had been much greater than in her friend. The long separation from her husband had added many cares to her life, and there were some of them the heavier to bear from being unshared by any one. The childishness and brightness that distinguished her younger days had given place to a certain wistfulness of expression that was at times very touching.

Mother Theresa, after surveying her with a puzzled expression for some time, only said,—

"This is no daughter of mine. She is in the world, and has no part in St. Bridget's. Where is Cecily? Has she brought me the priest she promised me?"

Lucy shook her head and turned sadly away, saying to Cecily, "Her mind is always running on the idea that you will bring her a priest; and my belief is that she never will die happily till she has seen one."

"I wonder whether she would understand it if one were to come?" Evelyn asked.

"You know," said Cecily, "there is really no fear now in asking one to your house."

"No," said Lucy; "but I do not think my husband would suffer one of the old faith to enter his house; but here he is coming in, you can ask him yourself."

At this moment John Holdworthy entered, and after a few general remarks, Evelyn said,—

"We were just talking of the old mother, and how she is longing to see a priest. Do you not think it would be a good thing to gratify her? It might compose her mind."

"It is only some wandering fancy," said John Holdworthy; "the day when priests could exercise charms is gone by."

"But it would bring no danger upon you or your family," pursued Evelyn; "and if it is merely a sick person's fancy, it is sometimes well to gratify such."

"I do not think she can know one person from another," returned the farmer; "besides, what can priests do more than other men?"

"Have you not noticed," said Cecily, "that in one of what they call the exhortations to the new communion service, which is now used instead of the mass, the priest says, 'And it there be any of you whose conscience is troubled and grieved in anything, lacking comfort or counsel, let him come to me, or to some other discreet and learned priest taught in the law of God, and confess and open his sin and grief secretly, that he may receive such ghostly counsel, advice, and comfort, that his conscience may be relieved'?"

"You see," said Evelyn, "that you can choose what priest you like for your adviser. What would you say if I were to bring Father Arundel some day to see my poor old friend? He is certainly discreet and learned, and my own father thinks there is no one like him."

"I can have no objection to receiving a visit from a gentleman like him," said John Holdworthy. "I should think myself honoured by having him under my roof; but I still think the poor lady here is too far gone to benefit by such a visit."

"Well," said Evelyn, who had gained a habit of acting and deciding for herself with considerable promptitude, "if you have

no objection to see him here, I will invite him to visit me at Pendower, and bring him over some day. He does not believe in charms, any more than you do ; but yet, I have heard my father say that his presence in a sick-room often acts as a charm ! ”

“ It is not the man, but the message,” said John Holdworthy stoutly.

“ Well, perhaps it is a little of both,” said Evelyn. “ When one is with a very good person, one seems to catch a little of his goodness.”

“ The old story,” said John Holdworthy, shaking his head. “ The old story, always cropping up, like the weeds you bury in the autumn, which push up again in the spring. The priests taught us to hang on to the skirts of some saint or angel, and if we could cling close enough we were somehow to get to heaven in their train ; and you, my lady, say it is ‘ a very good person ’ who will make us good. No one likes to face the thing out for himself, and go straight to the Fountainhead. I beg your pardon, if I am saying too much ; but when the heart is full, the tongue speaks.”

“ You are welcome to say what you like,” said Evelyn lightly, “ especially after granting me a favour ; but I think my friend Miss Tremaine is more fitted to carry on such a serious conversation than I am.”

And thus, after a few more words with Lucy, the visit ended ; and Evelyn, after her return home, lost no time in sending off a messenger to request her father to beg Theodore to come to Pendower to visit a very urgent case of illness.

CHAPTER XVI.

ANOTHER CONFESSION.

VELYN'S message was so unexpected by the squire, that he, believing something very urgent had occurred, sought out Theodore without delay, and offering to mount him on his best horse, entreated him to lose no time in visiting Pendower; but finding that he had never yet been there, and did not know the road, he decided on accompanying him himself the next day, and sent word back to Evelyn to that effect.

When the next day came, and her guests were expected, Evelyn began to consider within herself whether she had not meddled too far, and a certain uneasiness crept over her. However, when the squire arrived, and heard who it was that was in trouble, he commended his daughter for the steps she had taken, and said he should certainly like to see his wife's kinswoman himself, and to make some acknowledgment to the Holdworthys for their care of her. But this it was decided should be later, and that Theodore should first visit her, and endeavour to calm her troubled and wandering mind. Evelyn also asked Cecily to conduct him to the house, as she was glad to have her father with her to visit some distant part of the estate.

Late in the afternoon, therefore, Theodore set out, Cecily acting as guide. For some way after leaving the village of Pendower their road led them through the valley, ascending very gradually towards the higher ground by the banks of the chattering stream, which dashed over its rocky bed in its haste to reach the lower ground by the sea. Rich banks of clustering ferns grew on the edges of the stream, and the sides of the valley were clothed with young oaks, which had only just burst forth into leaf. The entire seclusion and charm of the scene seemed to lead their thoughts away from the turmoil and troubles of life, and Theodore related to Cecily how he had grown up as a boy by his father's side, and how he had taught him to ride, and to shoot with the long-bow in the forest glades near which their home was situated; and how in his happy childish days this father had been everything to him, for his mother had died when he was an infant, and left him an only child to his care.

Then came another episode in his life, when his father became his instructor in learning as well as in bodily exercises; and this created a fresh and closer tie between them, for none of the gentry or nobles in that part of the country cared for such things, but to himself this higher sympathy that was called out between them only added an almost adoring friendship to the childish love he had felt for him in his earlier years.

And then came the period of youth, when his father was preparing to part with him in order that he might have the advantage of finishing his education at Oxford, when the blow fell which shattered all his earthly happiness, and left him a solitary being in the world.

Cecily listened with the deepest attention to this recital,

scarcely breathing, lest she should lose a word. Then Theodore paused, saying,—

“But why should I weary you with the story of my sorrow? It is very selfish; we will now rather look forward than backward.”

“Indeed you do not weary me. I should like to hear all, if you do not mind telling me,” said Cecily.

“It is a dark tale, but not a rare one in those times we have just left behind us,—not sadder than has befallen many families, only it seems sadder to me because my father was all in all to me.” Then he continued: “You know he was a deep student of Scripture, having obtained in his early years a copy of Wycliffe’s Bible. He lived in such seclusion, and mixed so little in the politics of the country, that he hoped he might escape molestation; but this was not to be. When the persecution of 1528 broke out, his absence from the rites of the National Church was not unobserved by a priest in the neighbourhood; and on one occasion, when one of our keepers was dying, this same priest came to administer extreme unction, and found my father praying in English by his side.

“When he came away from that cottage, he told me that he saw in the priest’s face that evil was intended him. I entreated him to fly and save his life (for even then the burnings had begun); but this he refused to do, saying it was useless,—that the snares for heretics were too well laid. He then spoke to me with the presentiment of death upon him, and told me his last wishes as if upon his death-bed. He told me, what only too surely came to pass, that if he were merely suspected of heresy, and refused to give account of his faith, he could be imprisoned for a year, according to the Papal Decretal, and might afterwards be burned as a heretic. He then charged me,

when he was taken, to make my way to the Continent, to friends to whom he gave me tokens.

“ ‘They will take all the land,’ he said, ‘and leave us penniless ;’ but having looked forward to the day when this would happen, he had taken thought for my well-being in this as in everything else, and he put into my hands bills on foreign merchants sufficient to maintain me till my education should be completed. ‘They will let you pass at your tender age,’ he said ; ‘and remember, I leave you free to think and act as you deem best when your mind is matured.’ He then urged me to lose no time in taking my departure ; but I obtained his leave to stay to the last moment. Those precious hours were my last on earth with him, for very shortly afterwards he was arrested. I had never disobeyed him willingly in my life, and I could not do so now when he commanded me to leave him. He cheered me with hopes of rejoining me on the Continent, saying that when they had taken all our property it was like enough they would let him go, as he had always been a loyal subject and never meddled with politics. Afterwards I knew—what I did not see at the time—that these were but hopes put forth to ease the parting to me his son ; for I had not been long in Germany when the news came that he had borne his testimony to the truth by a fiery death.”

Here Theodore paused, as if recalling these events had become too painful to him.

Cecily's tears were by this time falling fast. “Alas !” she said, “that such things should have been. How did you live and bear it ?”

“I do not know,” said Theodore. “For some time I did not live at all. I felt lost and stunned, and as if my own life were put out. At length my dead father's last words came back to

me, and I read and studied in the Book that had been his greatest treasure in life and in death ; and by degrees it was given me to see how greatly he had been honoured in being thus called to bear his testimony to the truth, and that the heritage that was left to me as his son was to make my life worthy of his death. I do not know how much of what is called time passed over my head while I was thus passing from darkness into light ; but I went to that little German town a stripling, and I left it a gray-headed man, and yet the years were few that I was there. I then prepared and girded myself for the battle of life by studying at the various German universities that were recommended to me by those friends of my father who had received me in my sorrow. Then, considering that the change in my appearance was so great that none could know me, I resolved to visit England and sojourn a while at the University of Oxford. It was there that I met with Edmund Vivian, and formed a friendship with him, which led to my connection with his family, and to that first winter at Vivian Hall, which gave me a glimpse of something like happiness,—a sort of strangely home-like feeling ; and you know how the ties then formed have shaped my subsequent career. What further influence they may bring to bear on my future destiny yet remains to be seen.”

They had by this time reached the head of the valley, and emerged on the open downs. A few sheep were browsing amongst the gorse, and bees were returning home with their treasures ; otherwise, they appeared the only living creatures on the whole wide expanse, which was bounded in one direction by the blue line of the Atlantic, and on the other seemed to melt into the sky. Equally bare and desolate did life in the world look to Cecily, and this barren heath had often appeared

to her as a type of that wilderness of life which she so much dreaded when she allowed herself to think of the future. But now the history of Theodore's early days made her see some similitude in their lots, and she remained thoughtful and sad. Possibly he divined her thoughts, for he said :—

“I have long ceased to mourn that my honoured father should have been thus gloriously translated,—for I never think that he *died*. I only sometimes feel the way is long that must be trod before I shall rejoin him ; but yet the Sun of Righteousness is always shining, even as the visible sun illuminates this desolate heath ; and he is ever near to us, even when we see him not ;—and there are also some few wayside flowers,” and he stooped and gathered a late violet that had lingered in a shady place, and then gave it to Cecily.

She took the flower, and still walked on silently. She had been so much accustomed, from her early training, to look upon all members of the priesthood as a distinct caste, entirely removed by their profession from the feelings and affections that influenced other persons, that this revelation of Theodore's early days, and the deep feeling that he evinced when speaking of them, seemed to bring him into her own sphere. And as she pictured to herself his lonely life in foreign lands, his return to England a proscribed exile bereft of his patrimony, and even with his own life in danger should his enemies know of his existence, she felt that although hitherto in all their previous intercourse he had given her what she could never repay him in spiritual things, yet now there was something that she might be privileged to give him—and that was sympathy.

She hardly knew in what words to say this, but in some way she gave expression to her feelings ; and by the time they reached the Holdworthys, she became aware that reserve had

passed away between them for ever, and that they were now friends.

Both John and Lucy Holdworthy were at home, and for some time it was debated rather anxiously how it would be best to introduce Theodore to the old abbess.

"I think," said Lucy, "that as ever since she first saw Cecily she has been possessed with the idea that the priest she wished to see would come by her means, it would be best for Cecily to introduce Father Arundel, and then leave them alone."

"It is altogether hopeless that the poor old lady should recollect herself sufficiently to have anything of importance to say," said John Holdworthy; "but no doubt that is the best way to keep up the illusion."

Accordingly Cecily went into the room where Mother Theresa sat. She was in her arm-chair, which had been drawn up to the open casement facing the west, and the rays of the declining sun already illuminated the room and played upon the old woman's face. Her eyes were dim and wandering, and appeared to be aimlessly gazing out upon the sky and downs.

"Mother," said Cecily, touching her arm, "look here: I have kept my word;" and she beckoned Theodore to approach. He came close to the old woman, and repeated in Latin, as being more familiar to her than the English, the form of benediction which had formerly been in use in visiting a sick person.

Mother Theresa folded her trembling hands, and said "Amen!" in a quivering voice. For a moment a light as of consciousness came into the expression of her face, and she said, "The Lord reward thee, my daughter, when I am gone. The days of my waiting are over. Leave me with the holy man."

Cecily then withdrew into the outer room, surprised at her

manner, which reminded her of the Mother Theresa of former days. When the door had closed after her, Theodore then addressing the old woman in English, asked if she had anything on her mind which was a burden to her.

Again the light of reason flickered upon her aged face as she answered, "I have a something, a something that I have borne about with me these many years. I cannot remember now when it all was;" and she passed her hand over her eyes, and seemed to be trying to collect her thoughts. Then, in a quivering voice, she said, "The past is sometimes plainer to see than the present. I will tell you what I find there." And, fixing her eyes as if looking into the far distance, she said: "I can see the choir and the nuns the day I made my profession. Mother Agnes was then abbess, and Father Juanito was prior. I can hear the music in the choir, and feel how my heart followed the sweet notes to heaven. I was the youngest sister in the convent then, and my heart was full of zeal. I can remember hearing a stir in the convent in the night, and moans of pain. I kept my vigils then, and so, being clothed, ran out to see what it was. I saw an aged man carried in by the country folk, who had found him dying in the wilds. His head was shaven, and he looked a holy man. They carried him to a bed in the hospital, and all went away and left him with the portress and myself. I was the only sister stirring, and I stood over him and began to tell my beads, and sent the portress to call the rest. Then he laid his hand on mine and said, 'Swear by the blessed Virgin to do my behest;' and I swore. Then he said, 'Open my robe before I die, take what you find there, and swear to keep it secret till you are dying, even from the Prior of St. Wennon's and the lady mother here. Then I, being in fear, kissed the crucifix and swore; and he,

falling back on the bed, closed his eyes and died. I saw him carried forth to his burying ; and many were the prayers I said for the repose of his soul.

“ If I have sinned may I be forgiven ; but once Satan overcame me, and I looked at what he gave me,—never but once ; and many a penance have I done for my sin.”

Then Mother Theresa began to fumble in the folds of her dress, and with trembling hand produced at last an ancient parchment, worn and yellow, but folded with care, and sealed with the arms of the convent.

As Theodore took it from her, the light seemed to fade from her eyes, and she said, “ Shrive me, holy man, and let me die—my work is done.”

Theodore placed his hands on her head, and said, “ The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin.”

The aged woman then leaned back in her chair, and seemed to move her lips as if in prayer.

Theodore knelt by her side and repeated the Lord’s Prayer, and certain prayers from the Breviary which were suitable to her condition. But perceiving that the effort she had made in speaking to him had exhausted all her mental powers, after watching her a short time to see whether there was any appearance of returning consciousness, he summoned Lucy Holdworthy, and left Mother Theresa apparently asleep.

The evening was already beginning to draw in, and feeling that his mission was for the time accomplished, he told John Holdworthy that he should remain at Pendower for the night ; and that if he would send him a message in the morning, he would hold himself in readiness to pay the old abbess another visit should her mind be still restless and uneasy. He then set forward with Cecily on their homeward way ; but instead of

returning by the road they had come, she led him a shorter way over the open downs.

The sun was setting gloriously as they turned towards the west, and the golden rays had scarcely faded quite away when the curling smoke rising between the hills announced that they were above the valley in which Pendower was situated. They had not spoken much on their journey, but had silently enjoyed the splendour of the scene before them, each occupied with their own thoughts, which were sufficiently engrossing. At last, as they began to descend the valley, Theodore remarked,—

“What a strange vicissitude it seems that has brought your friend into possession of the place where your early days were spent together!”

“Yes,” said Cecily; “it was the only home I ever knew, and now I have none on earth. I have a few distant relatives who care nothing about me, and these kind friends who have taken in the orphan, and allow me to call their home my own. Many, alas, who lost their refuge when the convents were broken up, have not been so tenderly cared for as I have been.”

“And have you no fears or wishes for the future?” asked Theodore.

“You know what my one wish was for many years,” Cecily answered. “It was to join some community abroad, where I could take up again the life that was broken off here; but now I know this cannot be. The hindrances in my own self are greater even than the circumstances of my life. I am a learner in a new school. I put the future from me, and desire only more light and knowledge. Meanwhile, have I not a Father in heaven?”

“Assuredly,” said Theodore; “and He will doubtless lead

you by some way that you know not of to all that you can desire. If not here, then hereafter," he added, sighing.

The squire and Evelyn were watching for them as they entered the village, and seeing them both look grave, the squire asked, "Is aught amiss?"

"Nothing," Theodore replied. "I do not know what may come of my visit, but I think your kinswoman is not long for this world, and I scarcely know of what comfort I could be to her. Some day I will tell you what she said to me. Her mind was fixed upon the past. Perhaps she might know you, but I hardly think so."

They turned to the house, and the squire told Theodore all he had ever known of Mother Theresa's early life;—how she had taken the veil when very young, and had always been noted in the convent for her docility and gentleness; and being also a lady of good family, had been unanimously elected to be head of the community many years ago.

"I shall certainly pay her a visit to-morrow," said the squire; "it may be the last opportunity I shall have of showing her any respect."

But when the morrow came, a message arrived from John Holdworthy to say that there was no longer any need for visits to Mother Theresa; for the old abbess had fallen into a deep sleep some time after Theodore left her, during which her spirit passed away. Her death was so gentle, that Lucy, who was watching her, scarcely knew when sleep ended and death began.

Theodore therefore returned to St. Edel's; and the squire remained for a time at Pendower, in order to arrange that the funeral of Mother Theresa might be worthy of the state of a kinswoman of his family, and of the last Abbess of Pendower. She had been much beloved by the poor in the neighbourhood,

and her residence at the convent had been so recent that there were numbers who remembered her, and who followed her body to its last resting-place.

But it was noteworthy that no candles were lighted in the church at the time of her funeral, and no prayers were said for the repose of her soul.

CHAPTER XVII.

MIGHT IS RIGHT.



HE squire had scarcely settled himself at home, after his stay at Pendower, when news came in from the country that the people were rising in every direction against the Act of Uniformity and the English Prayer-Book. As a magistrate, he was much occupied with the vigorous preparations that were needful to keep the peace ; and when he heard that the rebels, ten thousand strong, were marching upon Exeter, he began to think it time to arm his men and go out on the king's side.

He soon found, however, that his people were in no mind to fight against their neighbours, who were mostly in the rebel camp. Indeed, it was said to him plainly,—

“We like the newfangled ways, in themselves, no better than others who are now in arms to bring the old ones back ; only Father Arundel is different to many of the new sort, and maybe he can teach us to save our souls, so we will not fight at all, neither for the priests and the old religion, nor yet for the king and the new.”

With such answers as this the squire was obliged to be content, and to think himself fortunate that, owing to the high esteem in which Theodore was held, peace reigned amongst his own immediate dependants.

It was very different at Pendower. There Evelyn had the vexation of hearing that many of the villagers had gone out to join the rebels ; and when at last the insurrection was subdued, a sullen and angry spirit remained amongst the people, which was not improved by the tidings that were brought home by stragglers from the rebel camp, that their lady's own eldest brother had been serving under Lord Grey on the king's side, and had drawn his sword against his own country people.

For once Evelyn was almost glad of Sir Ralph's absence, as, had he been on the spot, he would doubtless have taken such severe measures against the insurgents that the bitterness of party feeling would have been greatly increased.

As it was, she hoped the ill feeling would gradually die out, especially as they were some distance from the seat of the insurrection, and so had escaped a visit from the provost-marshal.

During this time of civil strife the squire had been so continuously occupied, that Theodore had not been able to induce him to set apart an evening for the consideration of Mother Theresa's affairs.

"Wait a little longer," he said. "There can be no hurry now the poor old lady is dead and gone ; and she certainly had no property and no heirs."

Still Theodore had felt anxious to relieve himself of the abbess's sealed packet, which he resolved to make over to the squire as being both a magistrate and also a kinsman to the deceased lady. In the meantime he laid it by unopened. As the month of August advanced, and public matters became more quiet, he once more broached the subject, and at last obtained the squire's ear.

As he related in a few words the manner in which the abbess had acquired the parchment, and the mysterious importance she

attached to it, the squire yawned and stretched himself, and said,—

“People shut up in holes and corners always make mountains of molehills. I dare say we shall find that the poor old man had packed up some relic in this parchment, with the legend appertaining thereto, supremely interesting to himself, but not so to any one else. Still, we will see;” and he took up the sealed packet which Theodore had placed in his hands.

“It has been opened before; I see the remains of a different coloured wax, partly hidden by the present seal,” the squire remarked.

“The abbess’s story was so obscure that I could scarcely understand the details, but it seemed as if she had understood that it was not to be opened until her death, and that she had yielded to curiosity and seen the contents,” said Theodore.

“Very likely indeed,” said the squire. “The uppermost seal is that of the convent; the ancient one is much broken and defaced, but I could fancy one corner to be that of the Pendower arms. However, it is of little consequence; let us see what we can find inside. And breaking it open, he discovered within the external covering some ancient writing in faded ink, and entitled, “Copy of the last will and testament of Sir Richard Pendower, made by me, poor brother of the order of St. Francis; after the death of the said knight to be taken for safety’s sake to the superior of my order.”

“What is this?” said the squire, all at once waking up. “Sir Richard Pendower! Why, that was Cecily’s grandfather, who willed away all his worldly goods that his soul might have rest, as the monks would tell us;—in reality that they might enjoy them though,” he added in a lower tone. “And so his daughter had nothing or next to nothing, and his granddaughter

the same, except her rights upon the community, which have now dwindled down to some insignificant pension."

"What then can this mean?" said Theodore. "Was the old will proved and attested?"

"It was all done before my time," the squire replied,—“when a certain Mother Agnes was abbess, and a Spanish father, Juanito by name, was prior. But let us see, this may be a true copy of the same will. I know it was brought from the field of battle by some aged monk, who confessed and shrived Sir Richard, and came away straight, but died himself soon after.”

Theodore had already glanced over the writing; and being more accustomed to such reading than the squire, the latter asked him to read it aloud. As he proceeded, the interest of both the reader and the hearer was much increased.

"What is this?" said the squire. "If this is the true will, those knaves must have practised some of their false tricks on the other. This would seem to say that Cecily's mother was the rightful heiress; and now, of course, her daughter must be so."

"But will it stand in law?" asked Theodore. "There is no signature."

The squire examined it carefully. "No," said he; "this document is in itself worthless. I should like to compare it with the will upon which the Abbess Agnes acted. Supposing the original of this could be found, and could be proved to be the true one, my son-in-law would have to make restitution, and our Cecily would be an heiress!"

Theodore sighed and turned away, as though the thought gave him more pain than pleasure.

"I suppose, though," said the squire, "that this is never likely to be. Those who contrived that the property should

come to them were likely to have arranged in such a way as that it should remain in the same hands. Still I wish Sir Ralph were here ; this matter ought to be looked into, and search made among the archives of the convent for any papers that may throw light upon it."

"Supposing that this will were found to be a true copy of Sir Richard Pendower's last will, and that the property were acquired by the malpractices of those interested in possessing it, do you think that Sir Ralph Oldcastle would consider himself bound to give it up to Miss Tremaine ?" Theodore asked.

"I do not know what *he* might *do*, but I know what *I* should *think*," the squire replied. "It were a sorry trick for the late king to give him another man's goods ; but a sorrier, in my mind, for him to keep them, once knowing whose they should be."

"He might say that the king knew not but what they were his lawfully to give away ; and the king having so given, he might be minded to keep what he had got. When once a man's fingers have touched pelf, it is hard for him to get them away from it," said Theodore.

"It is true what you say," said the squire ; "but I would Sir Ralph were here, that this might be set at rest. Meanwhile I am of opinion that we say nothing to Evelyn till he return. Having slumbered so long, the business may yet sleep a while longer. Moreover, I have had news to-day which to me bodes Sir Ralph's speedy return."

"And what is that ?" asked Theodore.

"It is, that the French king now occupies the forts around Boulogne, and that there is war between our nation and his in everything except the name. Hugh tells me that we are so badly provided for maintaining our defences, that if the French

are so minded they may make short work of us ; and my Lord Protector is too much involved in civil strife to provide money and men for the contest."

"If it is so," said Theodore, "I suppose we shall treat for peace, and buy it by giving up the late king's conquests."

"That is just it," said the squire. "And so Boulogne will go, and we shall have our soldiers back again."

The course of public events did not differ very materially from the squire's anticipations. War was soon openly declared between England and France ; but the extravagance of the Protector had been so great, that the means were not forthcoming for pursuing it with vigour on the part of England. It was not, however, until the month of March in the following year that a treaty was concluded between the two countries, which led to the evacuation of Boulogne by the English about six weeks later.

Meanwhile the Duke of Somerset had fallen from his place in public estimation and from his high rank in the kingdom, and the star of the Earl of Warwick was now in the ascendant. Much uneasiness was felt by the two great religious parties in the kingdom, who knew not into which scale the weight of his influence would be thrown. The translation, however, of Ridley to the See of London in the room of Bishop Bonner, who remained in prison, and later in the year the appointment of Hooper to the Bishopric of Gloucester, left no doubt as to the opinions which were now to be the favoured ones by the mighty of the land. Edmund wrote in great exultation at the promotion of his favourite divines ; but the squire remarked to Theodore, "that the times did outrun themselves, and that the people were scarcely ripe for the liberty that was given them."

To which Theodore made no objection, only saying that there seemed a kind of fashion in religious matters, and that he heard that what was once hated was now all the talk at the court and in all high places ; and that he feared ere long it would be seen how Protestants would labour to serve both God and mammon, as well as they of the old faith ; and it behoved everybody to make sure of their groundwork, or, should the fires of persecution blaze afresh, the fine new edifice of the English Church would crumble to ruins.

Evelyn meantime had been eagerly looking for news from France. During the continuation of the war nothing had been heard of Sir Ralph, for the siege had been closely pressed, and the English were shut up in their defences ; but when negotiations were opened in the spring, messages began to arrive, and tokens and letters became more frequent than they had been during the whole time of Sir Ralph's absence.

Day after day Evelyn mounted the hill at the head of the valley by which the messengers were wont to ride, in the hope that some decisive news might arrive ; and in due time came the tidings of peace, and of the probable return of the English soldiery. Then came a letter from Sir Ralph himself, saying that he hoped to be in London in the early summer, and after he had presented himself at court he should hasten to Pendower. But the joy that this news occasioned was cruelly damped by the information that Evelyn's youngest brother had been struck down during a skirmish beyond the forts, whither his valour had led him in the thick of the enemy ; and though rescued by his men, he had since died of his wounds. Richard had also distinguished himself honourably, and would return with Sir Ralph. This intelligence caused a deep sadness to fall upon the squire and Dame Vivian ; and one summer even-

ing, as Evelyn and Cecily were sitting together in the old convent garden, Evelyn said to her friend,—

“I do not know how I shall part with you ; but yet, when Sir Ralph returns, I think I must give you up to my father and mother, if you will consent to go and be their good angel, as you have been to me.”

“If they will have me back again, I can wish for nothing better,” Cecily replied. “Besides, you know, I only came to you on a visit.”

Evelyn laughed her old merry laugh at this.

“Rather a long one, you would say. Let us see, how long has it really been?” Cecily asked.

“Six years,” Evelyn replied. “You know you came to me the first year of my widowhood. I know you would not like me to thank you for all you have been to me ; and if it were not for my father and mother, I could not bear to let you go. But you know, dear Cecily, my home will always be your home too.”

Cecily only kissed Evelyn for reply. She knew that when her husband returned it would be well they should be left alone, and her remembrance of Sir Ralph was not so pleasant as to make her wish to stay ; but she felt that she could not leave her friend without some anxiety. Evelyn was now six-and-twenty, and the consequence of her being left, as it were, in command at Pendower, was to change a certain waywardness of character that she had always had to a degree of masterfulness that Cecily feared might occasionally come into collision with her lord and master, unless, subdued by her exceeding beauty and winning ways, he allowed her to take her own course in everything. These thoughts, however, she now kept to herself, and she only said,—

"You will see the Holdworthys sometimes when I am gone."

"To be sure," Evelyn replied. "And do not talk so, Cecily, as if you were never coming back again. You will come to see them yourself, of course."

It was not many days after this conversation that the much-desired sound of a company of horsemen riding through the village, and a blast of Sir Ralph's own trumpet, caused Evelyn to jump from her seat and rush to the porch to be ready to receive him. The horsemen were riding at full speed, and quickly the sound of their voices was heard in the court below, and in a very few minutes Evelyn entered the room where Cecily was sitting at her needlework, accompanied by Sir Ralph.

After greeting her with courtly deference, he turned to his wife, who, with a heightened colour, was perusing his features as if endeavouring to compare the reality with the picture of her husband that had been imprinted on her memory.

"And is this my Evelyn—my rosebud," said the knight, "grown into this stately dame?" and he surveyed her half with surprise and half with pleasure. "She is more changed than you are, Miss Tremaine, in these years of absence."

"Time has not been standing still with you, my lord," said Evelyn, as she touched the gray which now freely intermixed with his hair and whiskers.

"No; I suppose not," said Sir Ralph carelessly. "It has been a weary time, though—especially lately, when we were shut up like a badger in his hole, with uncommonly poor cheer, and the sea on one side and the enemy on the other. At first, when we could range the country, it was not so bad."

Cecily did not enter much into the conversation that followed, but she could not help noticing that Sir Ralph was much more

taken up with his own pleasures and his own privations than in hearing how it had fared with his wife in her lonely hours.

She had quite got over the indignation she had felt at the period of her first acquaintance with him, and was too familiar with the idea of his being the possessor of Pendower for it to arouse any feelings of irritation in her mind. Indeed, she had come to think that as the nunnery had to be dissolved by the will of the late king and parliament, it was no *fault* of his to be placed in possession of the property, although it might possibly be his misfortune ; and that as in former days she had done him an injustice, it was now her place to make all the amends in her power. Still she felt intuitively that she would be better away, and so when the squire came the next day to visit his son-in-law, she prepared to return to St. Edel's with him.

"Your mother will be glad to have Cecily, if she will come," he said to Evelyn. "Although she now has Dick with her, she cannot get over the loss of poor Tom, and she is ever asking about him and grieving for him."

To this Evelyn at once assented, and promised to visit her parents with Sir Ralph as soon as he could make it convenient to escort her. Cecily therefore before long found herself in her old home at Vivian Hall, and very naturally took her place there almost as if she had never been absent.

Sir Ralph meanwhile had been acquainting himself with the particulars of Evelyn's management during his absence ; and while in most respects he was well pleased with the state of his affairs, he expressed some disapproval that two or three of the tenants had had their leases renewed, instead of the land being retained for sheep runs, which he told Evelyn were yielding large returns to some of the gentry. To this she replied, that

she had consulted her father, and that she believed that it was chiefly owing to his advice being followed, and the land preserved for arable purposes, that the poor had had work, and the disaffection that had so widely prevailed in the country had made no head in their own neighbourhood. But Sir Ralph only laughed scornfully at this reasoning. "Let them rebel," said he. "We have a strong arm, and can keep them under."

Evelyn was distressed at this remark, and said,—“But then they will never love you as my father's tenants love him.”

Sir Ralph's brow contracted, and he said, “I do not wish to be twitted with your father's sayings and doings. I can take care of my own affairs.”

Evelyn was chafed and annoyed at this remark. She did not remember that in former times her husband had been so irritable, and she began to fear that the disposition he showed to grind down his tenants for his own present advantage, would provoke again those feelings of hostility which had borne such evil fruit in the preceding year.

On the religious question he showed no disposition to interfere.

“Let the Lords and Commons settle it as they will,” said he. “Whether we pray in Latin or in English, it is little odds to me.”

The promised visit to Vivian Hall did not take place until Sir Ralph had been at home for some weeks.

It seemed as if he were never in the mind to go there; and though Evelyn was pleased to find he was taking much more interest in his own property and neighbourhood than he had done before, and that he no longer sighed for courts and camps, yet she could not but feel that her father's experience would in many ways be beneficial to him, and that, in his haste to be

rich, he was likely to make very great mistakes. She was therefore much pleased when, one bright September morning, she heard him say,—

“Saddle me the horses, and let us away to St. Edel’s.”

The visit, for the most part, passed off cheerily enough. Evelyn kept her anxieties to herself, and devoted herself to cheering her mother, who was looking ill and depressed; and as day after day passed, and Sir Ralph appeared to keep on good terms with the squire, she hoped that, after all, harmony of action in practical matters might follow upon their further intercourse.

It however happened that one evening the squire was sitting up with Sir Ralph to a later hour than the other members of the family, and the conversation turned upon the state of the Pendower property, when the squire said,—

“There is a matter I have had on my mind to speak to you about, and I thought I would not disturb you immediately on your return; but as you and I may not be alone together for some time again, you shall hear about it now.”

“No bad news, I hope,” said Sir Ralph.

“I hope not,” said the squire; “but do you find the property at Pendower free and unencumbered?”

“All that part of the estate which came to the convent at a recent date through Sir Richard Pendower is free of debt, but the rest is heavily mortgaged, and I must get what I can out of the other to pay it off. The government is almost too poor to pay its soldiers, and I foresee I shall get nothing from court favour now-a-days, so I must look to the land. It is quite another thing to what it was under the old king; now it is every man for himself, and those who do not look to themselves will be down in the mire.”

The squire sighed and said, "I hope I shall not bring trouble upon you by what I have to say ; but I have my fears lest it may be proved some day that the gift of the king was no gift at all."

"What !" said Sir Ralph with flashing eyes.

"What I have to say is no disparagement to you or to the late king, your master ; but how can a man give to another that which he does not own himself ?"

"I do not know what you are driving at," said Sir Ralph in an angry tone ; "but what the king, my master, gave to me, I mean to keep. Might is right now-a-days."

"I do not know that," said the squire in a decided tone. "Do the right, and then let what will follow, has rather been my rule of life ; but if anything should be proved to shake your claim to the estate, your claim on the crown will of course remain, and the present king will be bound to make good the acts of the late king, his father."

"The king !" said Sir Ralph, scornfully. "The king is a child and a pauper, or will be so ere long,—thanks to his uncle Somerset. He is a puppet, to boot, in the hands of priests and old women. My claim to the estate of Pendower is good in law, and nothing can be proved against it."

"It may be so," said the squire ; "but knowing what I do, I am bound in honour to speak. What if Sir Richard never willed his land to the Church ? Why, then, it was never the Church's to hold, nor the king's, nor yours ; but it should go to the rightful heir, and I have heard somewhat of a will—"

"What !" said Sir Ralph, in high wrath ; "has Evelyn been blabbing ? The deceitful little minx ! Is this the way she keeps her husband's secrets ? I remember I told her trouble would come of that matter. The will is safe, where it can

never come between me and my rights; and I am glad of it, too."

"You mistake me, and greatly wrong my daughter," interrupted the squire. "I was speaking of a copy."

"You're a meddling old man!" Sir Ralph broke in, burning with passion. "I leave your house to-morrow, and never enter it again till you have learned to mind your own business, and leave me to manage mine!" So saying, he strode away in violent anger, leaving the squire in a state of indignation and perplexity which he had never experienced before.

"What can it all mean?" he thought. Somehow his words had a point that he little anticipated when he entered upon the subject with his son-in-law. It really seemed as if Sir Ralph *knew* of the flaw in his title, which his father-in-law had only *suspected*. And Evelyn, what had she to do with it? He was in doubt whether he should speak to her about it or not. However, this was decided by herself the next morning.

Sir Ralph's horses were ordered at an early hour, and he came down looking morose and sullen, while Evelyn was tearful and angry.

She threw her arms round the squire's neck, saying, "Oh my dear, dear old father, do not look so unhappy! It was not my fault, indeed; and Cecily should have all the land, if I could have my will."

"That she never shall!" growled Sir Ralph. "I suppose, however, I owe you some apology for what I said last night, as Evelyn assures me she did not break faith; but I say now, what I said then, that the land is mine, and mine it shall remain, for any old woman's tale that you may bring up, for there is no power that can rightfully take it from me!"

"I say no more," said the squire; "I only know that ill-

gotten goods never profit the possessor ; and I would rather my child should earn her daily bread with honest toil, than live in state upon the goods that belong to another."

"No more," said Sir Ralph,—“no more. The horses are waiting.”

And the squire watched them ride away in grief of heart ; for he thought of the time when his little daughter had first ridden forth on her white palfrey on her wedding-day, when he hoped he had given her to a good man and true, and the marriage-bells were ringing merrily. Now he watched them ride away, while the death-knell of his hopes was sounding wearily in the deep of his heart.

CHAPTER XVIII.

STILL WATERS.



HE squire pondered anxiously over the state of things between his son-in-law and himself; and coming to the conclusion that he would not have spoken so decidedly if he had not had reason to believe that he was secure in the possession of the Pendower estate, and that, at all events, he meant to maintain his own rights, he thought it best to allow matters to remain quiet, only telling Dame Vivian and Cecily that a few hot words had passed between them, and saying nothing of the cause. To Theodore he was more communicative, and told him the substance of what had passed, only adding that there was a mystery somewhere which time alone could fathom.

Theodore agreed with him, saying, that in such times as the present, land and property were cares which sat heavily on the possessor, and that a time might come when Sir Ralph would wish himself well out of them.

Later in the year the squire received a letter from his son Edmund, which caused him great satisfaction, as it was to the effect that he had at last determined on taking holy orders.

"It is well that he has cast anchor at last," he said to Dame

Vivian. "I hope he will now get to work, and set forward many on the good road, as his friend Theodore is doing."

"If all were like Theodore, I should have nothing to say against your reformation," said Dame Vivian; "but methinks at present we have gained nothing and lost a great deal. There is many a parish where the church is closed, or but one man to serve three or four, and he, perhaps, none of the best; and the Londoners are never satisfied, but have still more changes on foot."

"Softly, softly, my wife," said the squire; "what we have gained is solid metal. We have gained the Word of God for our birthright in our homes; we have gained a pure form of worship in which all can join, from the highest to the lowest; we have gained freedom of speech and freedom of thought; and we have on our side the men of the purest lives and the deepest learning that the age has produced. Do you call this nothing?"

Dame Vivian was silent, and he continued:—"It may well be that evil men will play the hypocrite and assume a zeal they do not feel, but that they ever have done, and ever will do; and though for a time we have lost something of order, yet have patience, and these things will right themselves. The thunder-storm clears the air of the deadly mists that breed fever and pestilence, and so these present troubles will but open the way for light and life to cast out the foul vapours of ignorance and superstition."

"But Edmund speaks of more changes yet," said Dame Vivian.

"It may well be that some few may follow," said the squire, "to bring the outside show of things more into keeping with the doctrine that is taught. Bishop Ridley hath therefore taken

away the stone altar out of St. Paul's, because it seemed to belong more to Jewish times than to Christian, the sacrifice of the Mass being nought, and the Supper of the Lord being more fitly celebrated upon a table; changes such as these are more of the fitness of things, and all may not yet see them alike."

"But Edmund speaks of the Prayer-Book, about which so much ado has been made, as having yet to be reformed."

"And why not, seeing that it is but of man's workmanship, and therefore naturally imperfect? It may need refitting, as it were, to suit more entirely the growth of men's minds. Edmund himself says that the most learned and most pious men are now at work upon it. What can we want more?"

"And what is this that Edmund speaks concerning Bishop Hooper not wearing his surplice? What has the ancient dress done that it should offend now?"

"Surely nothing," said the squire; "only that those who have been surfeited with Popery seem to see, in anything that reminds them of the priests, a reminder of the days of their own darkness,—and so even a dress offends. Besides, the most pious men are not always wise! But, for your comfort, our own archbishop, with Ridley and Master Latimer, wear the surplice, and think no evil of it; and Theodore says that learned men in foreign lands, though they may not wear it themselves, think it not unbefitting to a minister in holy things, and not worth the words that are waged about it."

"It would seem, then, that Master Hooper was over-wise in his own conceits, when he made so much noise about the wearing or the not wearing it."

"It may be so," said the squire. "And if it be, then his fault sits on the outside of him, and no trace of it shall be found when he has his robe and crown hereafter. But I would

answer for him that he would not count his life dear if, by laying it down, he might glorify his Lord; and even now he gives a large share of his worldly goods to benefit those of his clergy who have but little."

"I am, anyhow, glad that our Edmund has laid aside his scruples; he may now, perhaps, come to some of those neglected parishes where no clergy are," said Dame Vivian.

"He says in his letter, that he has been chiefly moved to this step by the preachers at Paul's Cross, who set forth the wickedness of the nation in such strong terms; also this purging away of all the dregs of Popery from all the public services of religion makes the step easier to him. But we shall not see him here yet. He must expend his zeal on rougher waters. You must content your heart with having Dick at home. He says he has done with foreign travel, and if our poor country should now have peace for a time there will be no work for soldiers to do."

The squire was right in his surmises. Edmund, for some reason, seemed to avoid St. Edel's. Hugh also was continued in his command, although there was a constant rumour of his company being disbanded. This, however, never happened; for although no more foreign wars were undertaken by the government, a large military force was needed at head-quarters to prevent the smouldering fires of discontent from bursting into open flame. The Earl of Warwick, now Duke of Northumberland, had succeeded in compassing the death of the people's favourite, the much-loved Duke of Somerset, and mutual fear and distrust prevailed in all high places.

In the midst of these political intrigues, the revised Prayer-Book and the second Act of Uniformity received the sanction of Parliament; the former, Edmund wrote, being chiefly the

work of Archbishop Cranmer, assisted by the learned Bishop Ridley. To these were also added the Articles of Religion, to guide the consciences of men in the troublous and uncertain times in which they were living. But these amendments were received in the country with none of the excitement that had marked the great change which had taken place when the mass was abolished. Some few had chosen their sides either for the old or for the new religion, but many were perplexed and troubled in mind, and knew not how to decide. There was also a large mass of ungodly persons who had begun to discover that there were ways of evading purity of life among Protestants as well as among Papists, and who were content, therefore, to swim with the stream.

Such was the case with Sir Ralph Oldcastle, who merely said he should never be found wanting as a loyal subject. "A good Catholic was I under King Henry, and a good Protestant am I under King Edward, and a good Papist shall I be under Queen Mary, should the time ever come for that. Honour to the king being, as I conceive, the first of duties."

"Is it so?" said Evelyn. "How would it be about the land, then, should the Papists come back to power?"

"Might is right," said Sir Ralph. "There are too many embarked in the same boat for any misadventure there!"

Evelyn sighed. She had no mind to contradict her lord, but a cloud had passed over her life since his return. She would sometimes visit the Holdworthys, and almost envy the peace and affection that reigned in their simple home. Sir Ralph was not unkind to her as long as she conformed to his will, but his whole soul seemed now devoted to the pursuit of money-getting; and instead of the friendly greetings she had been accustomed to receive when she went among the villagers and tenants, the

odium that he incurred seemed reflected on herself, and while some few regarded her with pity, others met her with a sullen indifference, as if she could have mended their position if she would. She saw but little of her own family, for ever since the disagreement between the squire and Sir Ralph she felt as if the latter were disgraced in her father's eyes; and while such was the case there could be but little pleasure in their intercourse. Passive submission to her lot appeared to be her portion for the present; and the more she thought of it, the less able she felt to discover how the wrong could be set right.

At St. Edel's, a calm had also fallen upon the daily life of the family there, which was of a different nature. With Cecily's presence a soothing and gentle influence had begun to prevail, which all acknowledged, though none spoke of it. She had once more obtained the loan of Theodore's Testament, and with him to apply to in every difficulty, her own mind grew rapidly, and she felt that she was laying up stores of spiritual knowledge and strength against an evil day, should one come.

The squire too, and even Dame Vivian, took much interest in these studies; and many an evening, as they sat round the chimney-corner, Dame Vivian would say, "Have you learned another chapter to-day that you could repeat in the gloaming?"

And as Cecily would repeat the sacred words of hope and peace, the dame would fold her hands, and say,—“Beautiful, very beautiful!”

The heat of controversy seemed to have died out, and an atmosphere of peace and chastened joy spread around them, as to each and all of them in their several degrees heavenly knowledge was unfolded more and more. Cecily, who had already become largely acquainted with the precious treasures contained

in the Word of God, was never weary of imparting her own discoveries to her venerated friends, and as she did so the beauty of truth and hope arrested her attention more forcibly than before; while her hearers, to whom many parts of the sacred writings were still quite new, listened eagerly to the Revelation, which told of that unseen world which one of their own family had already entered, and which could not be far off from either of them.

It was one of those resting-places in life which, in later days, Cecily often recalled with fond affection. In some respects it reminded her of her first winter at St. Edel's; but as she looked around at the visible changes in the earthly tabernacles of those dear friends, and still more at the inward changes in her own soul, she felt how much of life had ebbed away since those early days, when she first learned the charm of family life. Her friendship with Theodore had grown and ripened in such a way that it had now become an individual possession, and was insensibly adding a new charm to her life, linking, as it did, the past with the present, though as yet she dared not look on to the future.

From without came notes of discord and misrule. Evil men ran riot in the land, and used the sacred name of religion to cloak their villanies. Plots and intrigues appeared to thicken on the horizon; and the more intense the calm of that remote country parish, the more distracting were the reports that came in of what was going on in other parts of the kingdom.

At last the cloud, no bigger than a man's hand, which pre-saged the coming storm, made its appearance, in rumours of the failing health of the youthful king.

At first it was a surmise, then came certainty, and at last such apprehension that every message from London was received

with dread. Yet month after month passed and the king still lived ; until one July morning, before the sea breeze had quite died away, Theodore walked in at the open door with a countenance so grave that all started up, and said, "The king is dead !"

"It is so," said Theodore. "I had a despatch from Edmund before dawn, enclosing another from Hugh, which I have brought with me for you," said he to the squire.

As he spoke, the church bell of deepest tone began its knell. All looked at one another, and felt the echo in their own hearts.

"It seems not long since the bell was tolling for King Henry," said Dame Vivian.

"Not much more than six years," said the squire. "The young king was a boy of marvellous promise, but he could not outlive the age so fatal to his race."

"He is gone younger than our poor Tom," said Dame Vivian. "God rest his soul. He had neither father nor mother ; and though a king, his life was sore beset with cares."

"He is gone where no cares will perplex him now," said Theodore. "Although so young, his life was holy, worthy of the teaching he had received from good Master Cranmer, and his growth in grace was beyond his years. Yet was he over young to meddle in the affairs of state ; and I fear me the Duke of Northumberland has of late used his name for evil ends that will plunge the nation in civil war and bloodshed."

"What does Edmund say on this point ?" asked the squire.

"Edmund wrote but three days after the king's death, and says that by his will he has altered the succession, and bequeathed his throne to his cousin, Lady Jane Grey, who was lately married to the duke's son, Lord Guildford Dudley."

"Altered the succession !" said the squire. "No will of his

can override his father's will, which was settled by Act of Parliament, more particularly he being yet a minor."

"Edmund says that some do hold with the duke's party, because the Lady Mary is so bigoted a Papist," said Theodore, "and the Lady Jane has been proclaimed queen in London."

"No good ever comes from evil practices," said the squire. "I fear me the duke worked upon the mind of the young king when it was weakened by illness, or he would have seen that in setting aside his father's will he was acting as a tool in ambitious hands, in order that the duke's family might be set up in the stead of his sisters. If the right of succession is taken from the Princess Mary, by the same rule the Princess Elizabeth would lose her rights, and she is as good a Protestant as King Edward himself was."

"You hold, then, that the Princess Mary's rights should be maintained?" asked Theodore.

"I do," said the squire; "and if I mistake not, the nation will have her for their queen; only I would bind her down to allow the free exercise of their religion to those of the reformed faith, which, seeing how large a portion of her subjects are of that way of thinking, would be but equal justice."

"Where could you find an oath that would be binding on the conscience of a Papist?" asked Theodore. "Did not John Huss trust the word of his accusers? And what was his reward? Did not the Council of Constance pass a decree to the effect that promises made to heretics were not binding, and did he not die in the flames?"

"It is true," said the squire thoughtfully.

"They say, too," said Theodore, "that of late our prisons have been filled by persons who refused to conform to the new order of things. Would-be Protestants have therefore been

following the evil example of Papists ; and think you not, when Papists have the power, it will be visited ten-fold on the head of every man who dares to call himself a Protestant ?”

“ It will doubtless be so,” said the squire. “ But what then ? Shall we do a great wrong as a nation, to escape all these other evils ?”

“ I said not so,” said Theodore. “ The Lady Mary’s right is doubtless to be queen ; and our duty is to obey her as such in all things lawful, should the Almighty raise her to the throne.”

“ In all things lawful,” repeated the squire. “ And what of the things unlawful ?”

“ Then we obey a higher Master,” said Theodore. “ Many have said that the wickedness of the nation is so great that a winnowing time must come. Should this be so, it will be shown beyond all doubt how far the people value the newly preached gospel, and whether it is indeed their life. Edmund tells me that many preachers will use their pulpits to encourage the people to maintain King Edward’s will, which they represent as the Protestant cause. He himself seems in two minds, but Hugh, he says, will let you know later how events are turning out. Perhaps the packet I have brought you from him may give later news ; the date upon Edmund’s shows that it has been delayed somewhere.”

The squire opened Hugh’s despatch, which he read attentively and slowly. All the family were by this time in the room, the news of King Edward’s death having been made known by the muffled bell.

“ What does Hugh say ?” asked Dame Vivian impatiently.

“ His despatch is written some days later than Edmund’s, and it would seem that the temper of the nation is already showing itself. Many of the great lords, Protestant as well as

Papist, have declared for the Princess Mary, and have joined her with their forces in the eastern counties, and Hugh himself and his men have refused to bear arms against the lawful heir."

"This agrees with the report of the messenger who brought the despatches," said Theodore; "he says they were proclaiming Queen Mary in Devonshire as he came along."

"There is no doubt that Hugh is right, and that to bear arms against the princess would be to fight against the lawful heir. Yet would God it had been her sister who came first in the succession, or that the Lady Mary had been like-minded with her," said the squire sadly.

"It will go hard with the Duke of Northumberland, if I mistake not," Theodore remarked. "He is hated by the Catholics and distrusted by his friends, and the people have never forgiven him the death of the Duke of Somerset."

"It will go hard with him," said the squire, "as soon as the princess is queen; and maybe he will meet with his deserts. But it will go hard with others who have fallen into his snares. The poor Lady Jane, his daughter-in-law, a young thing of seventeen, and of marvellous piety and learning, they say, will scarcely escape, for all her youth and beauty."

"Perhaps," remarked Theodore, "the escape may be greater than we think. She may escape altogether the storms of life, and enter the haven of rest at full sail."

As he said these words he looked at Cecily, who was listening with blanched cheeks to this conversation. Their eyes met, and she remarked upon his countenance an expression she had not seen there since the earliest days of their acquaintance, when recent grief had left fresh traces of its presence; for the season of calm tranquillity he had recently enjoyed at St. Edel's had brought out the more genial traits in his character,

whilst those that had been formed in adversity had been kept in the background.

Cecily thought she detected also an expression of anxiety as he looked upon her, and thinking it might be that he doubted what part she would take should the winnowing come of which he had spoken, she said quietly,—

“Though the Lady Jane may escape much care should her life be taken, yet such an early death would cut short a career which, in one with such noble gifts, would have been a bright light in a dark place. For others who may have to take their part at the hazard of their lives, it may be well, when they have so little they can call their own on earth, that the temptation to deny the truth can be but small.”

Theodore still looked at her with an earnest questioning look, but Dame Vivian broke in,—

“Do not talk like that, Cecily. One would think the old persecuting days were coming back. If the Lady Jane has joined in a conspiracy against the lawful heir, and should unhappily meet her doom, that is no reason why other people who live quietly should be called upon to take any part in public affairs. The Lady Mary has always had her mass, and she and those who think with her will have it still; but for the rest of the people, what Parliament has settled cannot be overruled.”

“‘Cannot’ is a strong word,” said the squire. “I fear it will scarcely stand against Spanish influence and Spanish gold, and there will be plenty of both when the Lady Mary is firm on her throne; and we have seen how they work in other countries; therefore it is well to think of what *may* be, though One above alone knows what *shall* be.”

“Yes,” said Theodore, “that is it. And we may know for

certain that if we trust Him, His purposes will be ever those of love, even if for the present they should seem grievous. Let us, then, place our confidence in him, and not for ourselves only, but for those most dear to us ; thus shall we have strength for whatever may betide."

But even as he thus spoke there was an expression of such deep grief in Theodore's countenance, that it seemed as if the confidence of which he was speaking was yet absent from his own breast, and as if some overpowering personal sorrow were yet to try his faith, and prove whether the consolation he endeavoured to impart to others would be all-sufficient in his own sorest need.

CHAPTER XIX.

GATHERING CLOUDS.



UBLIC events succeeded one another with such startling rapidity after the death of King Edward, that the arrival of every fresh messenger from London was looked for with ever-increasing alarm.

First came the news of the declaration of almost all the leading men in the kingdom in favour of Queen Mary ; of her triumphal entry into London ; and of the arrest of the Duke of Northumberland. Then came tidings of how the prisons were emptied of the Popish bishops, and those who had refused to conform during the previous reign, and how their places were taken by many who, on the suspicion of treason, had made themselves obnoxious to the new queen ; amongst whom were Bishop Ridley and various preachers, who, in the interval between Edward's death and Mary's proclamation, had upheld the Protestant cause at the expense of the rights of the queen. Then followed King Edward's funeral, celebrated according to the rites of the Reformed Church by Archbishop Cranmer ; the last public service at which he officiated, as shortly afterwards the Latin mass was substituted in St. Paul's by royal authority, and preachers were appointed there to defend transubstantiation and the other distinctive doctrines of the queen's faith.

A little later in the year, the household at St. Edel's was startled by the appearance of Edmund, haggard and travel-stained.

"What!" said his mother, "have you so soon left your calling? or have you indeed changed your mind again?"

"It is not I that have changed, mother," said he; "but the world is gone mad, and the people are running after the mass and the mass preachers, as once they ran after the gospel and the gossellers."

"And the bishops?" asked the squire.

"Most of them are in prison, save such as are time-servers and preach the queen's doctrine to please the court. Nevertheless, Cranmer published a letter denouncing the mass, and proving the new Communion Service to be according to the mind of Scripture. The King of Denmark has interceded for our own Bishop Coverdale, on account of his learning, and has invited him to Denmark; and an edict is published to banish all foreign preachers of the reformed faith. So the true light is departing from England, and the number of the faithful diminishes day by day."

"And what will you do yourself?" asked his mother.

"I am in two minds," said Edmund: "whether to depart with the stream that is flowing outwards from England, or whether to remain for the encouragement of the few who are scattered about the land and maintain the pure gospel. For what saith the wise man: 'The worshipping of idols not to be named is the beginning, the cause, and the end of all evil.' I see an idolatrous woman ruling in the land, and already the images of Mary and the saints are being set up, and the people are falling down and worshipping them as in the days of King Nebuchadnezzar. I see the priests holding up to the people a

bit of wafer made by the baker, and they, poor ignorant souls, prostrate themselves as to a god. Truly, as the wise man says again, 'The invention of idols was the corruption of life.'

"And yet, all this is without law," said the squire; "for as yet there is no Parliament."

"Law or no law, the queen will have it so; and the people are bewitched, and see not where she is leading them. The false traitor Northumberland so beguiled them, they know not whom to trust, and like poor simple sheep will follow any one, so that they may be rid of such as he."

"He will never beguile any one again, and has met his just reward," said the squire.

"Truly he has," said Edmund; "and the Papists are welcome to their saint, for with his dying lips he said he had been all along for the Catholic faith, and was at heart for Rome."

"Then has he perjured himself either in life or death," said the squire. "For yourself, I would not have you act in haste in forsaking your native country. Wait a while and see the temper of Parliament. Maybe this frenzy will pass away, and the queen's lieges who have been concerned in no plots against the succession shall be allowed the exercise of their religion."

Edmund shook his head, and then asked what Theodore meant to do.

"When last I spoke with Theodore, his mind was that his flock here in the wilderness was committed to his faithful keeping, and that he would be a false shepherd did he leave them among wolves. So for a time I am content that thus it should be."

Edmund remained thoughtful a little while, then he said,—
"I will see if Theodore has any work he can set me about."

The time is short before Parliament meets, and then we shall know the mind of the nation."

The meeting of Mary's first Parliament followed very quickly upon Edmund's return to St. Edel's; and although it was then decreed that the mass should be restored, and the marriage of the clergy forbidden, yet, as there was to be no compulsion used to bring the people back to their ancient faith, Edmund determined that he would remain yet a while in the neighbourhood of his old home, and spread abroad the light of the gospel in remote districts where no clergy had yet come.

Sir Ralph Oldcastle, meanwhile, had been watching the proceedings in Parliament with keen eyes, but with other views. It had already leaked out that the queen was desirous that the abbey lands, which had been wrested from the Church during the previous reigns, should be restored to their original possessors. She had, it was true, upon her accession, promised the people of Suffolk and the Lords in Council that she would allow freedom of conscience in matters of religion; but no distinct pledge had been given about the land.

Sir Ralph had not any more faith in such promises than Theodore and Edmund, being perfectly acquainted with the elastic nature of Papal dispensations; but he felt much concerned in the view that Government would take respecting the land. He knew that he was unpopular amongst his own tenantry, and that soon the displaced monks of St. Wennon's would return from the Continent, and would leave no stone unturned to recover their ancient rights. The lands belonging to the priory had been included in King Henry's grant to himself, but the monastic buildings, being of small extent, had been let to a farmer who inhabited part of them, while the remainder were rapidly falling into a ruinous state. Still it was a suffi-

ciently desirable possession to make him see that the Prior of St. Wennon's would be likely to press for its restitution, and that, through Spanish influence, which was all-powerful at the court of Mary, it was not impossible that he might succeed ; and if once the monks were back at St. Wennon's, they would not rest until they regained the Manor of St. Bridget.

He had always been a loyal subject to the reigning powers, and had studiously held aloof from taking any part against Mary in the recent troubles that had convulsed the kingdom. Still he was far-sighted enough to know that the mere fact of his possession of such a valuable estate as that of Pendower would go far to prop up any charges that might be made against him ; and also, that his connection with a family so friendly to the reformed faith as the squire's might supply sufficient matter for his deprivation, should the queen's party ever arrive at entire supremacy. Among his own neighbours and tenants, also, there were not wanting those who would swear falsely to procure his removal, and thus gratify their own feelings of revenge for small injuries they had received at his hands ; neither would it be difficult for them to obtain absolution for perjury under the circumstances in which he was placed towards the former clergy of the district.

Ever since the high words that had passed between himself and the squire, he had held very much aloof from the family at St. Edel's ; therefore Evelyn was much surprised when one morning he announced his intention of riding to St. Edel's to see her father, and also said that he might not return at night.

"I will not take you with me on this occasion," said he, "for the days are short, and the wind is bleak over the downs at night ; and if it is possible I shall return before morning."

Evelyn knew his humours too well to ask to accompany him,

although she was longing to visit her own family, so she only said,—“If I cannot go over to see my brother Edmund, I wish you would ask him to return with you and visit me here.”

“Your brother Edmund!” said Sir Ralph. “I had forgotten that he was at St. Edel’s. He is an advanced heretic. I do not wish you to have any doings with him. The mass will now be set up, and it is my desire that you should show yourself a good Catholic, or it may be the worse for us all. There is, however, one thing in which you may help what I have in hand. You remember that ancient writing which we found before I left you for Boulogne?”

“Of course I do,” said Evelyn; “and if any trouble comes upon us now, I shall think it is because of that.”

“Softly,” said Sir Ralph; “I think I see how it may rather ward off trouble. But touching that writing that was put by at your request, have you ever mentioned to any one aught concerning it?”

“Never,” said Evelyn in an injured tone. “Have I not already told you so? Did I not give you my word?”

“Ah, well!” said Sir Ralph carelessly; “but there was another writing, was there not?”

Evelyn gazed at her husband in surprise.

“Is it possible that you have forgotten?” she said. “Of course there was; and you would have it burned.”

“I suppose you do not remember what was in it?” said he, in the same careless tone.

“Not remember!” said Evelyn. “How could I forget? Has what was in that writing not been present with me night and day?”

“Then, if you can remember so well, just refresh my memory by telling me what it was.”

"It was the true will of Sir Richard Pendower, Cecily's grandfather, leaving his estates to her mother, all but a small endowment to St. Bridget's for a priest to sing for his soul."

"And was it all destroyed?" asked Sir Ralph.

"All but the seal, which you know I picked out of the fire with the abbess's confession," said Evelyn.

"Could you swear this upon oath?" asked Sir Ralph.

"Certainly," Evelyn replied. "And oh, I hope you are going to give up the land. It has never done us any good since we got it. The people are discontented and hate us, and now we shall have the priests back again, and it will be well if they do not burn us."

"Well, fetch me the old writing that you saved, and I will go and talk to your father," said Sir Ralph craftily.

Evelyn took his key and fetched it as he desired. He put it into the breast pocket of his surcoat, and shortly afterwards rode off.

Evelyn was not satisfied that her husband's intentions were all that she could desire, and saw the precious document in his keeping with some apprehension; still, feeling herself powerless to oppose his will, she resolved not to dwell upon disagreeable thoughts, but to take the opportunity of his absence to visit the Holdworthys, fearing that Sir Ralph's time-serving propensities might before long prevent her from holding any intercourse with them, as they would naturally be objects of suspicion to all zealous Romanists.

She found Lucy alone, and from her she learned that her husband was making every preparation to leave England with his wife and family at the first note of persecution that was sounded. They had some place of security already prepared to which they would fly when the alarm was given, and John

Holdworthy had a brother who commanded a small pinnace on the south coast, with whom they were in communication, and who would carry them to one of the free cities of Germany.

"I tell you this," said Lucy, "because I have been thinking much of Cecily, and my husband has said that he would risk a great deal to save her. And I wish you to tell her what I have now said; but remember that no one else must know, or it may cost us our lives."

"Cecily!" said Evelyn. "But why should she fly? What has she done?"

"Think you, if the law is altered, and she has to give up the new ways in religion and return to the old, think you she will do it?"

"Really it is a hard question," said Evelyn. "She had more love for the old faith than ever I had, and held to it stoutly for many a year; but of late she has greatly changed."

"Do you think," said Lucy, "that if she were now called upon to give up her Bible, her English prayers, and the freedom she has had since the fathers went away, do you think she would do it?"

"I hardly think she would," Evelyn replied.

"Then my husband says," continued Lucy, "that the time may not be long before she will have to decide between doing this and a prison, or even worse, as the priests are sure to be hardest upon those who have been dedicated to religion; and your father will have enough to do to protect himself."

Evelyn looked very grave at this, and as she returned to her home she pondered very seriously on what trials might be coming to them all. For herself, the services that had been held at Pendower since the Book of Common Prayer was es-

tablished by law had been so dull and formal, that she herself had no insuperable objection to return to the more attractive ritual of the Romish mass, since she had found that it was in the power of the officiating priest to make the English prayers nearly as unintelligible as the Latin ones. Indeed, she had often thought that, performing the English service unwillingly, he had wished to make the contrast as unfavourable to the new service as possible. If, therefore, it was a mere question of outward conformity in public worship, she did not feel that she was called upon to be a martyr for the sake of the English Prayer-Book. She had not studied the differences in doctrine as Cecily had done; neither had she made the Scriptures her study; but on the whole she preferred what she understood of the reformed faith to the Romish, as being more agreeable to her strong common sense and her natural love of freedom and independence of action. Still, when she asked herself whether she could die for this preference, she honestly felt she could not. She knew that so far as her husband had any religion at all, it was of the old faith; but how would it be with her father, her brothers, and her chosen friend? Weary misgivings crept into her heart, and rebellious feelings against those who had stirred up this religious strife, and she returned home much sadder than she went out.

Sir Ralph, meanwhile, had galloped over the springy turf, and had found the squire alone in his chimney-corner, resting after his morning's work and his midday meal. He was astonished to see his son-in-law, and his welcome had as little warmth in it as was possible for such a man as the squire to give.

Sir Ralph, however, took no notice of this, being intent upon his own objects, and after a few cursory remarks he plunged into the subject which occasioned his visit.

"Some time ago," he said, "we had some talk about the Pendower lands."

The squire bowed his head and folded his arms, wondering what was coming.

"I may then have spoken with haste and disrespect," continued Sir Ralph, "as I thought Evelyn must have betrayed a secret I left with her ; but I have since found my mistake."

"I think she told you that at the time," said the squire.

"She may have done so, but my anger was too great to heed it ; and now I am come to make what amends I can."

Again the squire bowed his head and assumed a listening attitude.

"I thought," continued Sir Ralph, "that you might not, in the first place, object to telling me how you gained your information respecting the Pendower estates ?"

The squire smiled, saying, "Then, after all, it is I who am to make amends, by giving you the information you are seeking." But seeing the angry flush again mount upon Sir Ralph's cheek, he continued, "However, I have no great objection to answer you in part." And going to his bureau, he unlocked a drawer and produced the copy of Sir Richard Pendower's will, which he had received from Theodore.

"There," he said, "read that, and then tell me whether you have any reason to believe that to be a true copy of the knight's will ?"

Sir Ralph read it attentively, and found it to be the facsimile, as far as he could remember, of the will he had destroyed. When he had done reading and had returned the document, he drew Mother Agnes's confession from the pocket of his coat, and placing it before the squire, said, "Now, read that, and tell me whether the one does not explain the other ?"

The squire read the document with feelings which were almost too strong for expression, and at last throwing it down, said, "That will explain the fate of two victims ; but how many more have been sacrificed to the greed of churchmen, Heaven only knows."

"But with respect to this will," pursued Sir Ralph. "If, besides these documents, the seal could be produced which attested the original will, think you Miss Tremaine would be able to establish her claim in a court of law?"

"That would depend on whether the judge were corrupt or not," said the squire coldly.

"But supposing you were the judge?" asked Sir Ralph.

"Then I should cry shame on him who, having seen these writings, could hold the land until a court of law should compel him to do justice to the rightful owner."

"This is all very pretty," said Sir Ralph ; "but I should call that man a fool who gave up his broad acres until he had at least secured an equivalent."

"An honest fool is better than a covetous knave," said the squire ; but fearing that his words were too severe, he qualified them by saying, "nevertheless, seeing they were given as a recompense for services rendered to the state, the state, in my opinion, should make good their loss to the present owner."

Sir Ralph smiled a curious smile, and then said,—"I suppose I should be asking too much confidence if I asked who gave you that copy?"

"I am not minded to answer that question," said the squire shortly.

"Nor, perhaps, whether any one but yourself knows it is here?"

"I love not mysteries," said the squire ; "and since you are

curious, you may know that there is one person besides myself who has seen it ; and that is my friend Theodore Arundel."

"Always a priest mixed up in everything, whether Protestant or Papist," muttered Sir Ralph.

"There is some difference in the use that the Protestant or the Papist would make of such knowledge," said the squire.

"Well, yes, in this instance it may be so," said Sir Ralph ; "and I suppose Father Arundel will not consider that he has a mission to acquaint all the world with so much of this knowledge as he has at present acquired ?"

"Theodore Arundel is a gentleman of as pure a descent as your own, and his honour is untarnished. I would trust him as my own son."

After a little more desultory conversation, Sir Ralph strolled out to look for Dick ; and ere the evening had quite closed in, he was again on horseback on his way back to Pendower.

The squire was rather at a loss to understand the object of this visit, as Sir Ralph certainly did not seem to have any present intention of making restitution ; he therefore concluded that it was partly intended as an overture of peace, and partly to gratify feelings of curiosity. The information that had been imparted to himself, however, by the perusal of Mother Agnes's confession, had thrown light upon a dark page of the history of St. Bridget's that made him exclaim to himself, as he sat by the embers that were smouldering on the hearth,—“Return ! I would that every Spanish monk and priest were sooner lying at the bottom of the salt sea, ere ever we have them back in England again !”

CHAPTER XX.

GHOSTLY TERRORS.

IR RALPH'S fears were for a time dispelled by the firm attitude of Parliament respecting the abbey lands, which many of the country gentlemen as well as the nobility were interested in leaving undisturbed in the hands of their present possessors ; but, at the same time, he saw the necessity of walking warily, as the queen was scarcely seated securely on the throne before she began to cause the death of Protestants for opposing her wishes in other matters. He therefore offered no obstacle to the restoration of the mass in Pendower Church ; and with the mass the rood was also set up in its accustomed place, with images of the Virgin and saints for the adoration of the people. The change was effected very quietly ; and although those who had been accustomed to attend divine service, as long as it was in English, no longer were seen in their usual places, there were others who had been absent then and who came to church now.

At St. Edel's, Theodore continued to use the English Common Prayer-Book, the Romanists being too busy with the work of restoration in the more populous districts to interfere much with remote places ; therefore for a time the quiet work

in which Theodore was engaged was suffered to proceed without molestation.

"It will be time enough," he said to the squire, "for me to withhold the bread of life from my people, when my hands are tied by the enemy."

"If you have counted the cost, it is well," said the squire. "And yet I would have you remember that in the cutting off of every life that is devoted to proclaiming the truth, the enemy gains the advantage of silence in which to propagate superstition."

"I have not yet resisted unto death," said Theodore. "And for every life that is sacrificed the Lord may raise up hundreds in its place."

"It may be so," the squire replied; "and yet it sometimes seems that evil men triumph. Since the martyrs of Bohemia fell, the light of truth has been extinguished there."

"It is only on the spot where the fire and sword did their bloody work," said Theodore. "I do believe those martyrdoms lighted the first torch of the Reformation."

The squire put his hand on Theodore's shoulder, kindly saying—"My young friend, I am not the man to counsel flight when the enemy is setting on, or to save life before honour; but yet I would say, throw not away rashly this gift of God. I love my native land, and would fain save for her service, in days that are to come, those who would maintain light and freedom in the midst of her."

Theodore pressed the squire's hand, saying, "Trust me, I will not court danger; but for the present I know of no man who is minded to interrupt me, since you, who represent the law in these parts, are not so."

Theodore's anticipations for a time were correct. The public

mind was much distracted by opposing views respecting the marriage on which the queen had set her heart with Philip, Prince of Spain, and the new year was ushered in with plots and insurrections which gave the government sufficient occupation to suppress. They, however, imbittered the strife between Papists and Protestants, and caused the prisons to be overcrowded with future victims of Mary's wrath. Amongst the first of the sufferers was the Lady Jane Grey, and others who had been entrapped by the late Duke of Northumberland into his conspiracy against the queen's succession.

Then followed the queen's marriage itself, and an influx into England of Spanish and other foreign ecclesiastics under the shelter of Philip's wing; and simultaneously an exodus of many of the married clergy, who, with their wives and children, took flight beyond the seas, to escape the dark days of persecution—the first of the twelve thousand who, it was computed, eventually gave up their cures for conscience' sake. Still, as conformity could not be enforced by penalties, Theodore held on at St. Edel's; but all eyes were turned with anxiety towards the Parliament which was about to meet, in which it was believed the great battle of religious freedom would be fought.

There were not wanting indications of the way the wind was setting. Bonner, Bishop of London, had already gone beyond the law in pressing Romanism on the clergy of his diocese, and had remained unreprieved. Gardiner, Bishop of Winchester, had sought to re-establish the Inquisition, but still remained supreme in Mary's favour; and in the writs that were issued to those who had the conduct of the elections, the electors were especially admonished to select such members as were of a grave and Catholic sort. The doctrines of the Reformation had

naturally made most progress among the younger and better instructed of the people, while those who were older and unable to read inclined to the old superstition. This admonition, therefore, went far to secure a Parliament which would be conformable to the queen's wishes.

While the country was waiting with breathless anxiety for the issue of the great struggle, Sir Ralph Oldcastle had again his anxieties aroused by an incident that occurred nearer home. The tenant who rented the old Priory of St. Wennon came to him one morning in breathless haste, saying,—

"Please, sir, I can live in the house no longer. I would rather throw up the farm."

"Throw up the farm! And what for?"

"Please, sir, it walks now."

"Walks! Is the man mad? Does your house walk?"

"No, sir; worse than that—the spirit, sir!"

"What spirit?"

"Haven't you heard, sir, that we've had a spirit there all this fall?"

"No; I have never heard such a thing."

"By Our Lady, sir, but there is one. Sometimes it's in the chimney, sometimes it's in the wall, chattering and mumbling all to itself. For some days we hear nothing of it, and then it comes back again worse than ever. My wife daren't stay in the house by herself for fear of it."

"Has any one ever seen it?" asked Sir Ralph.

"That's the very thing that brought me here," said the man. "Yesterday, in the dusk of the morning, as the girl was coming in from milking, she saw a gray something skimming over the ground without touching it; and then the earth opened, and down it went. She was so frightened that she let fall her

buckets of milk, and ran screaming into the house. This morning none of the women folk would go milking ; so I went myself. And as I went across the first field, what should I see but the very same gray figure coming towards me ; when all at once it stopped, and raised its arm and pointed to me."

"And what did you do?"

"Why, what any one else would have done in such a case,— I took to my heels, and never stopped till I had reached the house and bolted the door ; and then when the sun was up I came on here."

"You say it was a figure. Was it in shape like a man?"

"I could not rightly see its shape, sir, because of the darkness ; but it was about your height, sir ; and it came skimming over the land like a bird, till it seemed to be near me, and then it pointed to me as if it were overlooking me. And I've felt bad ever since, and shall do so until the priest has sprinkled me with holy water."

"And how long is it since you first heard these noises of which you were speaking?" asked Sir Ralph.

"We heard them first about the time the leaves were beginning to turn," said the man ; "near upon two months ago."

"Well," said Sir Ralph, "I will give you a shilling to wait for the holy water till to-morrow, and to say nothing about what has happened to any one ; and I will come myself and stay in your house to-night, and in the morning I will see whether the spirit will show himself to me."

"Thank'ee, sir," said the man, grinning. "But if you see him once you'll never want to see him again, leastways if he makes you feel as bad as he has done me."

So the man took the shilling, and went his way ; but as he passed the churchyard he met the priest coming out from saying

matins, and thinking it would be well to be on the safe side, he confided to him his uncomfortable feelings and the cause of them, and entreated him to exorcise the evil spirit that was in him with some of the blessed water. The priest turned with him into the church, and making him kneel within the porch, performed some incantations over his head. The man then placed the shilling he had received from Sir Ralph in the alms-bag, considering it well bestowed, inasmuch as he returned minus the trembling and chattering of teeth with which the evil spirit had afflicted him.

After dark, the same evening, Sir Ralph arrived at the old Priory, and, wrapping his military cloak around him, prepared to pass the night in the room where the ghostly noises were most frequently heard. The hours stole by, but yet no spirit was heard or seen, and at last the crowing of the cocks made him think it must be time to sally forth to watch for the apparition. He therefore laid aside his cloak, and taking nothing but a stout quarter-staff in his hand, began to pace up and down the field outside the house, like a sentry keeping watch.

It was a dull November morning, the heavy white mist hung thickly upon the surface of the land, the air was perfectly still, and not a sound gave a token of life from the sleeping world. Sir Ralph strained his eyes to look into the dim distance, but nothing could be distinguished but here and there the shadowy forms of trees, whose tops appeared where the mist was lighter, but whose trunks were altogether hidden by the prevailing gloom.

“What an idiot am I,” thought he, “to come on this fool’s errand !”

At last, just as he had made up his mind to return to his warm nook in the chimney-corner, he became aware that the mist

was darkened by some moving object at no great distance from himself ; and he perceived, as his tenant had described, that a figure was moving across the field, and, owing to the lower part being concealed by the thickness of the mist, it seemed to be skimming through the air.

Sir Ralph was not troubled with fears whether of the natural or supernatural world ; he therefore resolved on giving chase, and, taking a long breath, bounded forward.

The figure seemed to perceive his approach, and ceased the skimming movement and stood still, extending its arms. Sir Ralph, however, continued his onset, and speedily found he had come in contact with a substantial object very much like a human figure. The impetuosity of his charge, however, overthrew his opponent ; but in falling, the extended arms closed round Sir Ralph, and, at the same time managing to trip him up, they both fell to the ground together, wrestling as they fell.

“Man or fiend, or whatever thou art, unhand me,” shouted Sir Ralph, “or it will be the worse for thee.”

“Ralph Oldcastle, sinner as thou art, let go thy hold, or I will curse thee to the death,” was the only reply.

Sir Ralph, however, encouraged by a voice which sounded to him very human, only struggled the more violently to free himself, which at last he effected ; and then planting his knee upon his fallen foe, said,—

“Fiends should speak Latin. Tell me, who art thou ?”

“Remove thy sacrilegious knee, or it will be the worse for thee, here and hereafter,” was the only reply.

“Who talks to Ralph Oldcastle as if he were a girl or a fool I will never remove my knee, for all thine impotent threats.”

“Listen then to reason if thy conscience is seared, and know

that it were better for thee to have me for thy friend than thy foe. I am Cyprian, Prior of St. Wennon's."

A sudden instinct inspired Sir Ralph with the conviction that it would be useless to provoke his antagonist further, so he removed his knee, and said in a sulky voice,—

"Who would have thought of a reverend father playing ghost in this fashion?"

The tall figure raised itself from the earth, saying,—

"I will grant thee the pardon thou hast not the grace to ask by reason of thine ignorance; but I have somewhat to say to thee, Ralph Oldcastle."

"Say on then, holy father," said Sir Ralph, slightly raising his cap in token of reverence.

"Know then that the time is not far distant when you and I may change places—when it may be your part to ask for shelter and protection, and mine to give or to withhold it. Even before these leafless trees shall be dressed in the verdure of spring, that most holy handmaid of the Church, Mary, Queen of England, aided by her spouse, Philip, Prince of Spain, from henceforth blessed for ever, shall have made this kingdom's peace with Rome, and caused that the curse and blight which have rested upon her native land shall be removed by her means."

"This may well be," returned Sir Ralph; "and her Majesty has ever found that Ralph Oldcastle is as loyal a subject as he is a dutiful son of the Church."

"And does this most dutiful son of the Church think it well done that he withholds from her her lawful patrimony?"

"As to lawful, I can't say," replied Sir Ralph; "but if you are speaking of the Manor of St. Bridget, I got it by no unlawful means."

"You received it from the accursed hands of that spoiler, that worse than infidel, Henry, King of England. But have a care, the day of restitution is surely coming," said Father Cyprian in a hollow tone.

"It may be so," said Sir Ralph carelessly. "That is, if Holy Church can prove her claim."

"It may be so—nay, it *shall* be so!" said Father Cyprian. "And the reason that I have sought this meeting with thee, Ralph Oldcastle, is to give thee the chance of atoning for thine errors by doing me a service which lies in thy power at this time. Take the opportunity that is presented thee now of doing well, and it shall be better for thee hereafter; neglect it, and it shall be the worse."

"I do not see that this meeting was of your seeking, holy father," said Sir Ralph, with a slight tone of derision in his voice.

"Fool that thou art! did I not know your purpose almost before you conceived it yourself? Should I have put myself in your way if I had not had something of moment to say? Dally not, but answer me."

"I have not yet heard what this service is?" said Sir Ralph hesitating, and beginning to think it would be the best policy to be on friendly terms with the monk for the present.

"Simply this," said Father Cyprian; "it suits my purpose, or rather that of the most holy father the Pope, that my mission in England should at present be a secret one. I have, therefore, taken up my abode in these wilds, and by playing on the fears of these simple people, by making use of underground passages and means of access with which I am well acquainted, I have led them to think that my presence here is a spiritual one. All I ask of you is, in the first place, to leave them in this belief; and, secondly, to make known to no one that I am here, more

particularly your wife and her heretical relations, until such time as I absolve you from your promise."

"If that is all, I will promise," said Sir Ralph.

"Swear then—swear on the crucifix," said Father Cyprian, producing a small crucifix from the folds of his robe.

Sir Ralph swore ; then kneeling on one knee, said,—

"Your blessing, holy father."

"I had never thought to have blessed one of King Henry's robber crew ; but the worst of sinners may mend," said Father Cyprian, and placing his hand on his head, he murmured a few words in Latin.

As the knight rose, Father Cyprian said, "It will not need many words from you to hasten these good people away. Let them alone, and they will flit before evening."

So saying he moved away ; and presently Sir Ralph saw him apparently sink into the earth, as his tenant had described the day before.

Faint streaks in the east already began to indicate that the day was near. So after one or two hasty turns, in which he endeavoured to collect his thoughts, Sir Ralph returned to his chimney-corner.

He found, however, that the farmer and his wife had risen during his absence, and were cowering over the embers for mutual consolation. They glanced at him with frightened eyes as he entered, and said,—

"Has your honour seen aught ?"

"There was a something," said Sir Ralph, in an indifferent tone ; "and it was very much what you described ; so I've been thinking that you and your family had better come into the village and occupy the empty house by the mill till we can find out what this is. You shall have it rent free."

The farmer and his wife were profuse in their acknowledgments, and said, if he would allow them, they should like to move that very day.

To this Sir Ralph made no objection, and then said he would leave them to make their preparations, and strode away. After he was gone, the farmer's wife touched her husband, and said in a whisper,—

“Did you see the stains on his clothes? Surely he's been fighting with Satan.”

“And got a fall,” said the farmer. “I never saw him so humble-like before. In general, he's almost as proud as Lucifer himself.”

“I thought I heard the clash of weapons,” said the woman.

“Nonsense. Spirits don't carry swords; and Sir Ralph had only his staff. But there was a bustle and confusion in the air for all that it's so quiet,—just as if the spirits were abroad riding tantivy. I shall be glad to leave this lonesome place,” said the man, drawing a long breath.

“Harness the horse, then, and get all ready, while I make ready the breakfast,” said his wife.

Sir Ralph meanwhile had returned home with various uneasy feelings implanted in his mind. The confident manner in which the Prior of St. Wennon's had spoken of restitution as being near at hand, made him revolve in his mind the best method of strengthening his defences, whilst at the same time establishing his character for orthodoxy. He had no mind to give up his estates on the one hand, nor to be burned as a heretic on the other; and most heartily he hoped that others who were in the same plight as himself would hold firm to their possessions, however obtained. Still he could not help admitting that Father Cyprian had good grounds for his confident tone.

Who would have believed it possible a year and a half ago that the mass would have been generally set up again in England ; or that nearly the whole bench of bishops should have undergone a change ; or that the House of Lords should be so changed as scarcely to know itself ; or that the House of Commons now about to meet should be as Papal in its sympathies as the one at the commencement of King Edward's reign was Protestant ; or that the Spanish marriage, against which the whole nation had lifted up its voice, should have taken place in spite of Lords, Commons, and Council ? And all this by the will of one imperious woman, who had now set her heart upon wresting from him and from others those lands which they held as their own !

CHAPTER XXI.

PLOTS AND COUNTERPLOTS.



THE month of November passed away, and still the little party at St. Edel's remained unbroken. Edmund had not been much with them. He had led a wandering life in the remote villages of that part of the country, where he had found a welcome; sometimes amongst the farmers and country people, sometimes amongst the fishermen and sailors who lived upon the coast, who would listen to his preaching with curiosity and sometimes with interest. This wandering life seemed to suit him better than any distinct cure of souls; indeed, as he was accountable to no one, he saw that he could pursue this irregular sort of ministration when the churches would be closed to all "gospellers," as the reformed preachers were called.

Theodore had still continued his regular ministrations at St. Edel's, although, as each Sunday passed, he had the feeling that it might be the last that he should be allowed to meet his people; but week after week passed, and still he was there. News from London came in very slowly. The energetic measures of Bishop Bonner had banished all persons of the reformed faith who were able to fly; and with the sword of persecution unsheathed and hanging over the Church by

a single thread, it was dangerous to commit to writing anything that might endanger either the sender or the receiver.

One Sunday morning, the first in December, the party at the Hall were startled by hearing the bells ring out full half an hour earlier than the usual time.

"What can this mean?" said Dame Vivian. "I thought we had the right time."

But there was nothing to be done but to hurry off as fast as they could, and they reached the church door just as the bells were tolling for the clergyman. To their surprise, they met Theodore, looking pale and anxious, and approaching the church from the opposite direction.

One glance at his face was enough for the squire, who said, "Is it all over with us?"

"I fear so," said Theodore. "I hear that the late Prior of St. Wennon's has been seen in the village this morning with some foreign priests; and he, having a duplicate key, has, I imagine, taken possession of the church."

They opened the door and went in. At the same moment the chancel door unclosed, and a procession issued forth with Father Cyprian at the head. Fumes of incense soon filled the edifice, and the procession filed down the aisles and up again, chanting as they went.

Then Father Cyprian, in the full robes of the Romish priesthood, began the ceremonial of the mass, assisted by a stranger of foreign appearance.

Many persons had hastened to the church, not knowing what had occurred, and had begun to glance uneasily at one another; then some left the church, while others began to whisper together and to collect in groups.

The squire beckoned those who were with him together, and said in a whisper,—

“Dick, take your mother home ; and Cecily, you had better go with them, unless you are prepared to adore the Host when it is elevated.”

Dame Vivian pressed her husband’s arm, at once taking in that there was danger in refusing. “You will come with me,” she said.

“Not now, but presently,” was his reply. “I must see the play played out, and consult with Theodore what is to be done.”

She knew it was in vain to oppose her husband’s will, and placed her hand upon Dick’s arm, beckoning Cecily to follow. But Cecily appeared rooted to the spot as if by a kind of fascination.

“Go now,” said the squire urgently ; “soon it will be too late.”

But Cecily only said, “I cannot go ; do not press me ; I feel I must stay.”

Dame Vivian moved on without her, while the squire glanced at her with surprise, and Theodore with an expression of such deep pain that it appeared as if he had been overcome with a sudden faintness.

The congregation had been so completely taken by surprise, that as the ceremonial proceeded it more and more became evident that those who had remained in the church were doing so more from curiosity than any other motive.

When the moment came for the uplifting of the consecrated wafer, Father Cyprian advanced in full view of the people, and raised it high above his head for the usual adoration to be performed. Some bent their heads, while a few prostrated them-

selves as of old. Many, however, remained standing, as if merely spectators of a drama in which they took no part themselves.

Amongst these were the squire and Theodore, and by their side stood Cecily. Her companions glanced at her, but she remained immovable, only her lips moved as if in silent prayer. For a moment Father Cyprian's glance fell upon the little group, and a darker scowl gathered upon his countenance. Then the ceremonial proceeded, and afterwards Father Cyprian ascended the pulpit.

He had come there, he said, as having the right to officiate in the church as Prior of St. Wennon's, and also of appointing a vicar in his absence. He desired to remind the people that he who had been officiating there since the death of good Father Andrew was a wolf in sheep's clothing, who had climbed into the fold of the Church on false pretences; and that it was impossible that he could offer any true sacrifice for their sins, as the power of changing the elements into the body and blood of the Lord, and of offering them as an acceptable sacrifice, could only be obtained by those who had received true ordination; and that the orders of such as received imposition of hands from heretic bishops, who had been excommunicated by the holy father at Rome, were worse than useless.

Therefore he (Cyprian) had taken pity on their lost estate, and had brought them a true priest of the true Catholic Church for their vicar, who was endowed with ample powers from Rome to receive back to the bosom of their mother the Church all such as had wandered from her during the period of darkness and infidelity through which they had been passing; and he bade them return and confess their sins while yet there was time. "For," added he, in a voice of thunder, "the day is approaching when it will be too late. Already has our gracious

queen made her peace with Rome, and on the 30th of November last did she resign to St. Peter his proper patrimony ; and even now, while the hours are passing that I am speaking here, is the penitence of a repentant nation ascending on high as a sweet odour of incense. Repent, therefore, ere it be too late ; for soon the terrors of the Lord will be abroad, and all heretics and abominable persons shall meet the due reward of their deeds."

When the preacher had concluded his address and descended the pulpit stairs, Theodore stepped forward, and ascending the chancel steps, beckoned to the retiring congregation.

"This is not the time," said he, "to enter upon any controversy concerning what has just been said to you from this pulpit. As to the doctrines you have been taught by me since I have ministered amongst you, I will fearlessly put them to the test of the holy oracles of God, and leave your consciences to decide whether or not I have kept back anything that as a faithful steward I ought to have imparted. This is perhaps the last time I may have the opportunity of addressing you publicly, it being the queen's pleasure, and now the law of the land, that ministers of the reformed faith shall no more teach in our churches. Therefore, O my people, I would speak this last time as a dying man to dying men. Rest not in any ordinance of man which blots out the image of Christ in your hearts. Suffer not any stranger to come between you and your Saviour. Drink deeply of his spirit and grow in his likeness. God is my witness that the end and object of my labours among you, however unworthy, has only been to bring you to a fuller knowledge of Him for the saving of your souls."

While Theodore was speaking, the priests and acolytes who had been assisting in the service endeavoured to drown his

voice by raising a monotonous chant ; but when he came to this point, seeing that a tumult was likely to be raised, he descended from the steps, and, walking through the midst of the weeping congregation, rejoined the squire and Cecily, who then left the church with him.

Silence was first broken by the squire, who said,—

“ It is all over with us now, I suppose ! ”

“ Have you heard whether the penalties to enforce religious conformity are yet enacted ? ” asked Theodore.

“ I believe the discussion is still going on in Parliament,” said the squire. “ No doubt the possessors of the abbey lands will give the queen some trouble before all is settled ; but the first step being taken, and the Papal Supremacy restored, all the rest will follow in time. The bold step taken by this priest is a proof that he sees his way pretty clearly. I only wish yours were as plain. And then there is Cecily.”

Theodore turned to Cecily with a look of intense feeling, and said, “ Forgive me if I doubted you ; but I must confess that, when you stayed in church, the bitter thought came across me that the old superstition had yet some attraction for you.”

“ You might well think so,” said Cecily ; “ indeed, I never seemed to see my way quite clearly till then. One sometimes needs to be brought to a point suddenly to know oneself. The sight of Father Cyprian recalled all the past in a moment of time, and I felt I could not go back, but, whatever the consequences might be, that I must go on ; and so, as the confession had to be made, I thought the sooner the better.”

“ It was bravely done,” said the squire ; “ and yet I liked not the looks of that priest. I saw him, as it were, taking account of those who knelt and those who did not, and I marked his eye resting upon you.”

For the first time Cecily saw that she might be the means of bringing trouble upon her friends ; and so she said, " I hope he has not the power of injuring you. I will go away, or do anything you may advise, rather than that."

" We have yet a little time before us," said the squire, " to consider what to do for the best. Have the Holdworthys yet left the country ?"

" Not yet, I believe," Cecily answered. " When I last saw Evelyn they had not gone."

The squire remained buried in thought, while Theodore, coming up to Cecily's side, addressed to her a few words of hope and encouragement, and then said,—

" You cannot think how much I was strengthened and comforted by the part you took."

" Was it so, indeed ?" she replied. " You must need much comfort at present ; and oh, I hope there are many in your little flock who feel, as I do, that you have been the means of bringing them spiritual peace and joy !"

Theodore looked at her gratefully, but made no reply, for their hearts were full, and each one knew that trial must be near, though in what shape it would meet each one severally none could tell.

Meanwhile rumours came flying from the seat of government concerning the hot discussions that were proceeding in the Houses of Parliament. At one time it was, that the laws protecting the liberty of heretics were to remain in force, and that the clergy would have no more power than they had at present. Then it was confidently affirmed that Parliament had given way in everything to the wishes of the queen ; that she had herself given up all the Church lands that had been acquired by her father and brother, and that the great lords had pledged them-

selves to do the like ; while simultaneously they had repealed all laws protecting the persons of heretics, and re-established the bishops' courts for their punishment.

This report had such a wide circulation, that Sir Ralph, fearing the enactment might come into operation before he had taken the measures for his protection which he had been planning, resolved to lose no time in another trial of strength with Father Cyprian.

He therefore, one winter evening, walked leisurely in the direction of the old Priory. The stories which the farmer and his wife had circulated about the ghostly noises and appearances connected with the place caused all the villagers to give it a wide berth after dark. Sir Ralph, therefore, felt assured that, could he succeed in finding Father Cyprian on the premises, he was likely to see him without interruption.

A dim light in the lower part of the house indicated that there was at least a fire there, and therefore an inhabitant. He knocked loudly with his stick against a door which opened into a part of the house near to which he had seen the light. He was only answered by a muttering and grumbling, and clanking of chains.

"Avaunt!" he cried. "Send away thine evil spirits, and open to me, Ralph Oldcastle."

In a few minutes heavy footsteps were heard, and a voice said, "If thou art indeed Ralph Oldcastle, and hast kept thy word on the honour of a knight, then thou mayst enter."

"Good father, I indeed am he, and I come having kept the faith I pledged to you."

"And for what cause am I honoured with such a visitor, and at such an hour?" said Father Cyprian, withdrawing a heavy bolt, and throwing open the door.

"For the hour," said Sir Ralph, "I chose it as being the one in which I could best observe the secrecy which it pleases your reverence to maintain; for other causes, I must ask you to give me a hearing for a time."

"Enter, my son," said Father Cyprian. "The father is always ready to receive his son, and the physician his patients."

Sir Ralph accordingly entered, and followed Father Cyprian into an inner room, where by lamplight and firelight he saw the other ecclesiastic of whom mention has been already made. They appeared to have been occupied in writing, as there were numerous papers and parchments spread about.

"This holy brother is one before whom you may safely speak," said Father Cyprian, "unless your matter is for my private ear alone."

"What I have to say concerns you as much as it does myself," said Sir Ralph; "therefore it is for you to consider whether, in an affair which may touch you very closely, you would rather hear my confidence in private."

"Speak on," said Father Cyprian. "I have no matter so private that it may not be known to this good brother."

"The matter on which I am come to speak is concerning my tenure of the abbey lands of St. Bridget's."

"Ha!" said Father Cyprian, unable to restrain a certain degree of exultation in his voice; "is it, then, come to that? Would you treat with me concerning the spoil?"

"I do not understand your meaning," said Sir Ralph. "I am not cunning in fencing with words. I am a plain man, and am come to say a plain thing."

Father Cyprian was somewhat baffled by the confidence of his tone, and considered for a moment whether it was possible that he could have received later intelligence than himself from

the seat of government, and could know for certain that the abbey lands were to be secured to the laity. Rapidly running over some calculations in his mind, he came to the conclusion that it was impossible for the matter yet to have been decided in Parliament, and that it was not likely that Sir Ralph could have received any tidings so recent as his own,—which was to the effect that the bishops' courts for the punishment of heretics were soon likely to be fully re-established, but that the resistance to the motion for the restitution of Church property was united and firm. Thinking it, therefore, politic to conciliate rather than to provoke an adversary who might give him trouble, he said,—

“Speak on, my son ; and if it is advice you are needing in these difficult times, speak as to a father.”

“I am come rather to give you information which may not be new to you, although I rather think it will somewhat startle you. Did you ever hear by what right the community of St. Bridget's became possessed of the Pendower estate ?”

“By the last will and testament of that dutiful son of the Church, Sir Richard Pendower, who endowed the convent with his lands for the benefit of his soul. Doubtless he has long ago reaped the benefit of that good work.”

Sir Ralph smiled. “And supposing,” he said, “that the good work of which you speak was performed for him by another, and without his knowledge and good-will, think you his soul has still benefited by it ?”

“That is a difficult question, my son,” said Father Cyprian, “and scarcely a profitable one, for doubtless the intention goes for much in the performance of any good work.”

“I am much afraid, then,” said Sir Ralph, “that Sir Richard's soul is still in purgatory, seeing that the disposal of

his estates was effected for him after his death by one of your sainted predecessors, Juanito, Prior of St. Wennon's, assisted by Agnes, Abbess of St. Bridget's. These two excellent persons, in plain words, forged the will which went forth to the world as Sir Richard's; but one of them repented afterwards, and concealed the original will, with the statement of how it came into her possession. Her repentance did not avail her much in this world, as she was put to death for it by her accomplice, on the charge of heresy. But she managed to secure the original will in a safe hiding-place, where it was my lot to find it."

"You would not have me believe such a doubtful tale without proof?" said Father Cyprian.

"The proof is plain," said Sir Ralph. "Go to Squire Vivian's; he holds a true copy of the will, and will show it to you, and attest my words."

He craftily thought it best to suppress the fact that the original will had been destroyed.

"Until I am assured of the certainty of these things," said Father Cyprian, "I can have nothing to say about them. But may I ask whether it is altogether anxiety for the rest of Sir Richard Pendower's soul that has led you so far to confide in me?"

Sir Ralph smiled. "There we come to the critical point," said he. "The deed of gift by which I hold my property by grant from King Henry is altogether unimpeachable, and should the circumstances I have mentioned to you become generally known, so that the rightful heir should put in a claim, the State would be bound to give me an equivalent. You may say that I may be deprived of my title by future legislation; to which my answer would be, that the Church would not be

greatly the gainer, as with the documents in my possession I could prove that she had no right to the greater part of the domain which I now enjoy, but that, as the heir is still living, it would go to her, whilst my claim on the State for past services would remain unchanged."

"Is it, then, relief of conscience you seek for thus enjoying the Pendower property, while the rightful heir, as you say, is still living, as well as the Church lands of St. Wen-non's?"

"This produces another question," said Sir Ralph. "The rightful heir, as I suppose you know, is Miss Tremaine, now a pestilent heretic. Am I, a dutiful son of the Church, to give up my rights that she may come and sow heresy broadcast on the Pendower lands?"

"Your zeal is great, my son," Father Cyprian replied. "But it is as you say, I fear. Cecily Tremaine has fallen from her high estate. I marked her on Sunday last in company with the schismatical priest at St. Edel's, and your father-in-law, whose backslidings are also great. But you said that he held a copy of the will, and was also acquainted with the circumstances you have related to me. How is it, then, that he does not support the claim of the heiress, and marry her to one of his sons?"

"Because the proof of such claim is in my own keeping, and he knows that there it will remain. I suppose he may be content that things should be as they are, seeing that his daughter would inherit all at my death; although I will do him the justice to say that I never knew a man less ambitious of worldly goods than he is."

Father Cyprian revolved what he had heard in his mind, then he said,—

“Is it a dispensation you seek at my hands to hold these lands, your own conscience being disquieted?”

“I do not know that I can rightly own to suffering from an unquiet conscience,” said Sir Ralph. “If an accident had not thrown these documents in my way, I might have enjoyed the handiwork of Father Juanito and Mother Agnes without let or hindrance. Miss Tremaine is but where she was, and I have little doubt that my father-in-law will provide for her. What I rather came to say was this,—that hearing so much was said about the giving back to the Church her lawful patrimony, I would have you know that I am innocent, so far as the Church is concerned, of keeping back from her the richest part of my estate, inasmuch as it never ought to have been hers at all. But having laid out some money there, and being well content to abide where I am, I should be willing to do somewhat for religion, to merit the dispensation of which you speak. And since I see that you somewhat affect the old Priory up here, I would propose to restore to you, as Prior, the house you are in, with some portion of the land belonging to it, as we may determine hereafter.”

Father Cyprian smiled thoughtfully. “Very soon,” said he, “the power will be restored to the priesthood to enforce obedience by temporal punishment, with the hope of saving souls from eternal pains hereafter. If your heiress were to see the inside of a bishop’s prison, it might assist your purpose.”

“That is for you to determine, holy father,” said Sir Ralph. “In the meantime, I think we understand each other; and should you need further convincing, and will call upon me, I will show you at least one of the documents of which I spoke.”

Shortly afterwards Sir Ralph withdrew, considering within himself that he had effected a master-stroke of policy; and

rubbing his hands with glee, he thought to himself, "Now, the old priest will think twice before he attempts to unearth me, lest the house should fall about his own ears. And the sop I have thrown him is of no great value to me ; he is welcome to it, for no one else would ever live in it since those ghostly terrors have taken possession of the place ; and it will establish my reputation for sanctity. I could see, though, that he had an eye upon Cecily, and is wanting to get her within his claws. I must watch that, for there may be some deep purpose hidden beneath his zeal ; at any rate, I must not allow my father-in-law or Evelyn to get scent of such a thing."

CHAPTER XXII.

THE SQUIRE'S EXPEDIENT.

T last the blow fell. In the gray of a January morning Edmund aroused the sleeping household at St. Edel's by the news of his sudden arrival with tidings of importance. Theodore was with him, he having spent the time that had intervened between Father Cyprian's appearance and the present in travelling from house to house, and endeavouring to strengthen the faith and keep up the courage of those of the Reformed Church who lived in the outlying parts of the district; but he had, throughout, been in communication with Edmund, and agreed with him to meet at St. Edel's as soon as the subjects under discussion in Parliament came to a final issue.

It was a bleak wintry morning, with snow-clouds rising upon the horizon, and the wind rushing wildly over the downs, and whistling drearily through every crack and cranny of the old house.

Dame Vivian ordered a large fagot to be lighted on the hearth, and as it blazed up cheerily, the squire looked round upon each face, and said,—

“Are we all here?”

Yes, they were all there. All but Hugh, who had been

recently ordered on foreign service, and was with the garrison at Calais. And Evelyn was not there. She, at least, was in security at Pendower.

"I can almost tell before you speak what your tidings are," said the squire.

"All that we feared has taken place," said Edmund. "The queen has formally relinquished her supremacy as Head of the Church; and Cardinal Pole, as the Papal Legate, is here with ample powers to act for Rome.

"Parliament has given way to the bigots in every respect concerning religion; and the bishops have now ample powers to bring about conformity by burning, by torture, by imprisonment, and by every means that they may think expedient.

"I would have you notice that we are in worse plight than we were under King Henry; for then every offence was tried by a civil process, and the accused might at least hope for justice. Now, on the contrary, a zealous ecclesiastic may cause any one he has reason to suspect of heresy to be seized at his pleasure, and to be confined without trial in a loathsome dungeon; and remember that the bishop's prisons are worse kept, and the jailers more brutal, than the queen's. The next step is to stand before a tribunal in some private chamber, where a mock trial is conducted by men who have in their hearts already determined on the fate of the prisoner. The next is to the stake, if faithful; or to liberty of body and degradation of soul, if unfaithful. Well may we say, 'Who is sufficient for these things?'"

Dame Vivian groaned, and hid her face in her hands.

"Is it possible that we have come to this?" said the squire.

"It is," said Edmund bitterly. "But the same Parliament which has shown itself so regardless of the gospel of liberty and

love, has taken care to degrade itself by the basest mammon worship. It has confirmed all the holders of Church lands in their possessions ! ”

“ Is it possible that her Majesty the Queen and the Papal Legate have consented to this ? ”

“ Not only possible, but true. They, doubtless, considered that if they did not give way in this, they would not gain their other privileges ; and having gained them, the rest will come in due time, as other laws framed to restrain the clergy from unduly acquiring property have been repealed ; and in the dispensation which the legate has granted to the holders of Church lands, they are spoken of as ‘ detainers ’ of holy things, and reminded of the fate of Belshazzar,—which shows the light in which they are regarded by the Church, and the means the Roman priests are likely to take to recover their ancient plunder.”

“ Was any law passed affecting the succession ? ” asked the squire.

“ None, except to confirm the Princess Elizabeth in her rights,” said Edmund ; “ much to the displeasure of the Spanish party and the court.”

“ So, even as two years ago all our hopes depended on the frail life of the young king, even now our deliverance might come when we least look for it,” said the squire.

“ It might,” said Edmund. “ But should an heir be born to the throne, or should the queen’s life be prolonged to the natural age of man, we have many years before us of trial and perplexity ; and we know not where first the bolt will fall ! ”

“ Alas ! ” said Theodore, “ that I should be the messenger of ill tidings ; but I was on my way here to give the alarm, when I received the signal from Edmund to meet him here.”

All looked towards Theodore with surprise and consternation, and they saw at once that his eyes were hollow and his cheeks drawn and thin, like a man who had passed through a great agony.

"What have you to say?" asked the squire in an agitated voice.

"The cruel always prey upon the weak," said Theodore; "and now it is the tenderest lamb of the fold that the wolf would touch."

"You mean me," said Cecily, simply.

Theodore did not contradict her, and Dame Vivian gave a great sob, while the squire said, "Let us hear all. I am not wholly unprepared for this."

Then Theodore related how he had been staying recently with the Holdworthys, and had heard from John Holdworthy that Father Cyprian was inhabiting the old Priory with one or more foreigners; but that this was not generally known, the country people having believed a report that the house was haunted.

John Holdworthy, however, being very much on the watch, and suspecting mischief from the secret way in which the priests lived, soon found out that messengers were constantly passing and repassing to and from the Priory. On one occasion he recognized one of these messengers asleep on a bench in an alehouse, apparently overcome with drink. He took the liberty of examining his pockets; and finding a packet of papers, apparently written in a strange language, he carried them off, and not telling Theodore whence they had been obtained, he gained his assistance in reading them.

They were all written in Spanish, and some in cipher. Theodore, however, soon discovered enough to know that Father

Cyprian was in correspondence with Gardiner, and with the legate, Cardinal Pole ; that the latter sent him ample powers under the new Act to imprison and bring to account any notorious heretic ; but there was a special admonition not to attack the country gentleman of whom he had written, lest the people should rise, and discontent be created. The letter rather advised that he should make an example of the heretic woman of whom he spoke, as there might be more hope that such a one would recant, and so draw others after her,—conversions being more to be desired than any other means of re-establishing the truth, although when these could not be obtained it would be necessary to have recourse to wholesome severity.

There were other passages in the letter, Theodore said, which he had no doubt related to himself as the “false teacher who had been misleading the simple people ;” but he was convinced that the first person whose safety was to be considered was Cecily.

When he had done speaking, Cecily said—“Is it of any use to try and baffle them? Would not one victim suffice them? I would give myself up willingly.”

“Nonsense,” said the squire. “I would call up my tenants, and fortify the old house, and stand a siege, while the priests and monks were howling outside, rather than that. But unhappily these wretches have got the law with them now, and it might be safer to secure you some other way. Have the Holdworths fled?”

“Not yet,” said Theodore. “They will hide their property to-night in a secure place that they have within reach of their home, and very shortly they will fly to the coast.”

“I did receive a message from Lucy Holdworthy,” said Cecily, “through Evelyn, in which she offered me a refuge in

case of need ; therefore when the darkness comes on let me join them, and if I cannot fly with them, I would remain in hiding till the pursuit is past."

"This is not a matter to be hastily decided," said the squire. "Depend upon it, every movement of ours will be narrowly watched. At present we have the start of a few hours, or possibly days, as doubtless, when the messenger finds he has lost his papers, he will not show himself to his employers. But now, as we are all together—and Heaven only knows when, if ever, we shall be so again—I would speak to you all of a matter which has been much on my mind of late ; and it is concerning Cecily Tremaine.

"I would have you know that circumstances have come to my knowledge which have convinced me that the estates of Pendower are rightfully hers. I have been withheld from making these circumstances known, because I had no power to enforce restitution ; and I have acted for Cecily as I would for my own child. I considered that, supposing, with such evidence as it was in my power to give, I could succeed in restoring to her the patrimony of her ancestors, she would immediately become a mark for the machinations of the enemy ; and I had hoped she would have been suffered to remain in obscurity under the shelter of my roof until these storms were past and gone, and he who now possesses her rightful property would see the propriety of replacing her in her own possessions. But I do not believe that I have the power to regain them for her, apart from the concurrence of Sir Ralph Oldcastle."

The squire then related the Abbess Agnes's history ; then he called upon Theodore to state all that he had heard from Mother Theresa ; and, finally, he produced the copy of Sir

Richard Pendower's will, which Sir Ralph had verified as a true copy of the original.

When he had finished speaking, they all gazed at one another in surprise and perplexity. Theodore looked pale and rigid as a statue, and said nothing. Edmund fidgeted, and said it was not well done of his brother-in-law to be so silent on this matter. But Dame Vivian was the loudest in her exclamations.

"What!" said she—"and does Evelyn know this! and does she live in her fine castle as if it were her own, never considering that she is robbing her friend every day she stays there!"

"Softly, softly!" said the squire. "Remember that Evelyn only knows as much as it is the will of her lord she should know; and the subject, I could see, was one of bitter strife between them. Any hopes I have had of his coming to a better mind have been through her; and these hopes still remain, although to my grief and shame I know him to be as great a mammon-worshipper as any on the plains of Babylon. Yet the day may come when she may bring him to a better mind; and if not, when times amend, the government may be induced to give him a better return for his past services—which have been great in the late war, as well as in preceding ones—and then restitution would not come so hard to his covetous nature. But for the present our business is to secure Cecily. I only spoke of this matter now, because I would have my two sons, Edmund and Dick, understand it; and feel that, should they survive me, it will be their duty to see that Cecily is righted."

Here both Edmund and Dick murmured their assent, when the squire continued:

"I have a plan for Cecily, in which I shall require some help. Her safety may require her to reside for a time in a foreign country; but I think she knows me well enough to believe that I shall watch over her interests as if they were my own. I only wish Hugh were here; as my eldest son, he would represent me better if I were taken."

Here Cecily quite broke down. "Oh, my dear, kind friend, my more than father! do not think I care about the estates. Let Sir Ralph and Evelyn have them, and say nothing about this beyond ourselves. Indeed, I would much rather have it so. What should I, a lone woman, do with landed property? I do not understand such things as Evelyn does. Pray, pray, say nothing more about it. I never thought they were mine, and do not want them."

"Not now," said the squire. "But right is right; and if at any time I can see my way to have justice done without bringing you into peril, I shall move heaven and earth to such an end. Meanwhile it will be well for Sir Ralph if he does not wish himself well rid of this property before long, for the monks are not likely to let him have an easy time of it until they have a share in the prey. But now I must have a serious consultation with the two persons I most depend upon to help me in this difficulty; and the rest of you had better go away and consider what Cecily will most need in case a rapid flight should be decided upon."

Dame Vivian threw her arms round the weeping Cecily, and drew her away. Dick, at a sign from his father, also withdrew, and the squire was left alone with Edmund and Theodore. When the door was closed, he said:

"That wily priest will have her, if he can, especially if he has any inkling of this matter of the inheritance. Time is

precious, and there is only one chance of saving her. Can you guess my thought?"

"You suggested flight," said Edmund.

"Yes; but I did not mean alone. How could she, who has lived all her life in the greatest retirement, find her way about the world like an errant damsel?"

"She thought herself that she might accompany the Holdworthys," said Edmund.

"Foolish boy!" said the squire. "Has not John Holdworthy a wife and two children to look after; and is it not as much as he will be able to do to get them safely afloat, now that the ports are all closely watched? Is it possible you do not see my plan?"

"I confess I do not, sir," said Edmund.

"Do not, sir!" said the squire, waxing choleric. "Why, one of you must marry her, and take her off right away in Captain Holdworthy's pinnace, if you can get to it in time; if not, by other means which you must find out for yourselves."

Edmund looked very grave at this adjuration of his father, and Theodore fixed his eyes upon him anxiously.

"Blessed Mary!" said the squire; "you both look as grave as mutes at a funeral, and here am I asking you to have a most beautiful young woman for your wife! Why, if it had been myself at your age, should I not have thought myself at the tip-top of fortune!"

"But you, sir," put in Edmund, "were differently circumstanced."

"Differently circumstanced!" spluttered the squire, his wrath rising every minute. "Not at all. I had to work for my bread, and so will you."

"I did not mean that, sir. But you—"

"Is it possible," interrupted the squire, "that you are holding on to that figment of Rome, that old wives' tale—that because you are a priest, or whatever you call yourself, you should not marry?"

"Not at all," said Edmund; "only I was going to remark, when you interrupted me, that I have heard you say that you did love my mother before you married her; and I—well, if it must be said, I do not love Cecily."

"Not love Cecily!" said the squire. "Is the boy made of stone? Why, I love her myself. Every man, woman, and child—ay, and every beast—about the place loves Cecily! Not love her! Why, I thought I remembered that in former days there were certain love passages between you?"

"Not *between* us, sir. I did, in days when I was lighter and more youthful than I am now, regard Cecily with a sort of boyish worship; but she rejected me, and chilled me with her indifference. And when I came to see her again, I wondered how it could have been that such a folly had taken possession of my heart."

The squire's countenance fell, and he turned to Theodore with an expression of mute despair, and said: "How, then, can her flight be managed? What do you advise?"

"Alas!" he said, "this is no time for marrying and giving in marriage, when the next sun that sets may find the wife a widow, or the bridegroom bereft of his bride. But I had a thought of how I might help one for whom I would gladly lay down my life."

The squire's countenance brightened, and he said, "Let me hear what it is."

"I thought, if Miss Tremaine could join the Holdworthys in

their retreat, that I might obtain for her the dress of a foreign lady of distinction. She can converse in Spanish, so there would be no difficulty on that head; and as I have been used to assuming all manner of disguises, I might attend her in her journey either as her chaplain or one of her retinue. I should, of course, assume a foreign dress."

"That might do," said the squire. "But then there are the Holdworthys. You would find it difficult to turn John Holdworthy into a foreigner; and a large party attracts more attention than two people would do. It would be safer if you travelled to the coast in separate parties; and, in my opinion, Cecily could not go better than as your wife."

"I could not propose such a thing to her now, in her extremity," Theodore replied. "I will not deny that the thought has crossed my mind that if times of peace had come to our Church and country, she would be the one whose affection I should prize beyond all others."

"And have you never said so to her?" asked the squire.

"Never," said Theodore. "I have resolutely sealed my lips on the subject, and contented myself with the name of a friend only;—in former days, because I thought that Edmund had a leaning towards her, and also because her faith was different to my own; and then and now, because I have been accustomed to think my own life so precarious, that I had no right to draw another into the dangers I saw on all sides. It never occurred to me that she would herself be a mark for the persecutor. Even now shall I not be a wanderer all my days? How could I ask her to sacrifice herself for me?"

"It might perchance happen that the sacrifice would be a willing one," said the squire. "Dame Vivian, who is seldom deceived in these matters, has before now said to me that

Cecily was never so well pleased as when she was poring over a book with you ; though I must confess that I have thought, on the contrary, that she has been more silent when you have been present. I do not know what to say. If you will not have her, or she will not have you, I suppose I must take her to the coast myself ; but I am getting full old for such work, and then there is my old wife, who would be fretting without me."

"Suppose," said Theodore, "we go to Pendower when the sun is set. Sir Ralph Oldcastle has a good reputation for orthodoxy ; and Miss Tremaine might stay safely with Lady Oldcastle whilst we see the Holdworthys, and learn when they take their departure. I can guide you to their hiding-place."

"I do not think we can do better," said the squire. "Should you imagine, from what you could make out from the documents, that the enemy's movements will be immediate?"

"We are now within a few days of the twenty-eighth," Theodore replied, "when it was stated an edict would be published from the legate. There was a sketch of what this would contain. First, a summons to the clergy to return to the fold of the Papal Church, with offers of absolution on doing so, and threats of punishment by the ecclesiastical courts if they failed to do so by a certain day. Then the clergy were to exhort the laity to follow their example, and a time was also to be assigned within which their submissions were to be made,—the time proposed being Easter. Moreover, a book will be kept, in which the names of those who submit themselves to the yoke will be entered. It seems, therefore, that it is the cardinal's intention that the full severity of the law should not be exercised until Easter, and that in my own case I might be able to live in retirement for a few weeks longer ; but there was an ominous

sentence in Bishop Gardiner's letter, which seemed to make the danger more immediate to others. It was to the effect that special examples might be necessary to strike terror into the multitude; and remembering the great influence that Father Cyprian once possessed over Miss Tremaine's mind, it struck me that he might reckon on that as a means to induce her to return to Rome. My own feeling is that there is no real safety for her except in flight, and that after the twenty-eighth her peril will be great in remaining here. At present I have no doubt that Father Cyprian has his spies about, who are watching every movement of his intended prey; but from John Holdworthy having intercepted his letters, he is in ignorance of what we now know, and may remain so for two or three days."

"I have it," said the squire, tapping his head. "Cecily has a waiting-woman who is devoted to her. This woman, Alice by name, is about her height, and of a fair complexion. She shall be dressed in Cecily's clothes, and personate her in the house, to which she can affect to be confined with a severe cold; so that the out-of-door people may suppose Cecily to be here. There is only one maiden in-doors besides Alice, and she, I know, would not betray her. When the darkness falls, we will depart stealthily in parties. I will conduct Cecily over the downs, and you and Edmund can take separate routes, but our trysting-place shall be Pendower Bridge; there we will divide, and you shall conduct Cecily to Evelyn's care at the Manor-house, whilst Edmund guides me to the Holdworthys. We will then decide what arrangements it will be best to make."

"And think you," asked Theodore, "that Sir Ralph Oldcastle will lend himself to a scheme which, should it be discovered, would bring him into ill-favour with the monks?"

"I trust to Evelyn's influence to do what we want," said the

squire. "My last interview with Sir Ralph was of a more friendly nature than the previous one, and he could help us materially if he would."

"So let it be, then," said Theodore. "And now then for preparations for flight, whilst you propose our scheme to Miss Tremaine."

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE SQUIRE AT BAY.



VERY briefly and yet tenderly the squire broke to Cecily and his wife the decision that he had arrived at with Theodore. The long companionship of years was to be broken up, and one who had been as a light in the house was to go out not knowing whither. It was well that the time was so short that it was impossible to dwell upon their grief; but all knew the sorrow that would come afterwards, when the blank would be continually present to those who were left behind, whilst to her who was going away a blind feeling of desolation and terror was added to the pang of leaving those who had entwined themselves with her deepest affections. The idea of going to Evelyn for a time softened the blow a little; but yet, when the darkness came, and she saw her maid Alice attired in the garments that she had laid aside, and when she saw the squire bustling about and giving his last directions to Dame Vivian, her heart seemed full almost to bursting. At that moment Theodore stood by her side.

“Can you forgive me?” he said. “If it had not been for me this might not have been.”

She held out her hand to him and said, “Through all I know that our light affliction is but for a moment. Do not cease to pray for me that my faith may not fail.”

"I do ; I will," he said, "as long as life lasts."

At that moment the sound of the horses' feet was heard approaching.

"Now then," said the squire, in a voice which had a dismal attempt at cheeriness in it, "up, and away."

One hearty embrace from Dame Vivian, and a warm grasp of the hand from Dick, and Cecily felt herself lifted into the saddle by strong arms. She did not know whose, till she heard Theodore's fervent "God bless you !"

It was well that the squire had a leading rein attached to her horse's bridle, for she was so blinded with tears that for some time she could discern nothing. They rode gently past the cottages and outlying houses, but when they were fairly out upon the downs, the squire unfastened the leading rein, and telling Cecily to let her horse have its head and follow him, he set off at a brisk canter. The fresh air, and the necessity for care in riding at such a pace in the darkness, somewhat revived Cecily's fainting heart ; and as by degrees she became accustomed to the gloom, and saw the stars appearing through the evening mist, her drooping spirits rose to the emergency, and she felt she could thank God and take courage.

Onward they sped, and so well did their horses keep up the pace, that Cecily fancied she had never traversed the distance in so short a time.

Nevertheless, when they arrived at the bridge at the entrance of the village, and were walking their horses gently past the cottages, a dark object was visible on one side of the road. They had agreed that their watchword for the night should be "Au revoir," and they were thankful when the voice that answered their challenge proved to be Theodore's.

"I came by the lower road," said he, "being rather the

shortest. Edmund is on your track, and will be here presently."

"Then you ride on with Cecily," said the squire, "as our roads here will diverge. I will wait for Edmund, and join you two or three hours hence."

The squire turned his horse's head and rode back gently to meet Edmund, while Theodore with Cecily proceeded on their way.

Lights were glancing from one wing of the Manor-house as they approached, and a ring at the porter's lodge brought an old man, to answer the summons, who was well known to Cecily. But it had been agreed beforehand that she should if possible keep her arrival unknown to all except Sir Ralph and Lady Oldcastle; therefore, Theodore only announced themselves as belated travellers come to seek shelter for the night, and requested if possible to see the lady of the Manor. He then addressed a few words to Cecily in Spanish, and leaving his horse with the porter to hold, entered the house to seek for Evelyn. The old man, believing them to be foreigners, did not attempt to enter into conversation with Cecily; and very quickly Theodore returned, and after again speaking to Cecily in Spanish, he helped her to dismount, and leading her into the house, she at once found herself in Evelyn's arms. Theodore then returned to groom and feed the horses, not knowing what work might yet be before them.

The few words that Theodore had spoken to Evelyn had partly enlightened her as to the state of the case; and she at once led Cecily into her own private apartment, where Cecily related to her all that she knew herself.

Evelyn at once saw the difficulties before them, and said,—

"I think before my father comes I had better see Sir Ralph; he might be of great assistance if he were so minded."

"Tell him," said Cecily, "that I ask nothing of him, only perhaps a few hours' shelter till your father returns from the Holdworthys. I see that I may be the means of bringing all who are good to me into serious trouble, and that would be an evil return for all the kindness I have received."

But Evelyn put her hand upon her mouth and said, "If you only knew all, you would see that anything Sir Ralph or I can do is only our bounden duty. Whatever you may hear in times to come, only believe that Evelyn has done her best to right you."

Cecily saw that she was not aware that the squire had made known to her the secret of the inheritance, so she only kissed Evelyn, and said, "I shall never believe anything but good concerning you."

Evelyn found Sir Ralph in his armoury, where he spent much of his time with smiths and carpenters. He looked up in surprise as she entered and beckoned him apart. Briefly and in low tones she told him what had occurred. She was very doubtful how the tidings would be received, and whether she might not have to face an outburst of wrath when he heard that one who was suspected by the priests was actually under his roof.

She watched his countenance anxiously; but though it was gloomy and troubled, there was no sudden anger, no violence, and no displeasure against her.

He appeared lost in thought, and said nothing for some minutes. At last he spoke:—

"They seek her life, do they? and on a charge of heresy only!"

"So it appears. They have no other quarrel with her ; and I suppose they think if they could secure her, it would be a deadly wound to my father, and, indeed, to all of us. She has no near relations to protect her, and so they wish to make an example of her, as she has turned back from what they call religion."

"You may think there is no other motive, but I think I can see another," said Sir Ralph. "Her life must be saved ; it is of the greatest importance to me."

"To you ?" said Evelyn, bewildered.

"Yes. But not a word of this. Let her coming be carefully concealed. We must hazard nothing but what we cannot help."

"She is in the disguise of a foreigner ; and I saw that my brother's friend Theodore was in the dress of a serving-man. I see that he is to assist in her escape to a foreign country. I do not exactly know how, but we shall hear when my father arrives."

"That is well," said Sir Ralph, "and the sooner the better ; only keep all quiet."

Evelyn returned to Cecily greatly relieved by the manner in which Sir Ralph had received her intelligence, and the two friends sat over the glowing embers in Evelyn's room and talked as those talk who think they may meet no more on earth.

In the meantime Sir Ralph had sought out Theodore, whom he soon recognized in spite of his disguise ; and drawing him apart, heard from him a more detailed account of what had occurred.

"Miss Tremaine ought to be out of the country by the twenty-eighth," said he ; "once in the clutches of the law, no rescue would be possible, and recantation alone would save her life." To this Theodore agreed, and after waiting a short time

with Sir Ralph, said he would walk out and meet the squire and Edmund.

The stars were shining brightly as he paced up and down the avenue leading to the house, and he revolved within his mind the events of his life, past, present, and future. He had now reached middle life, and yet he felt no older, indeed scarcely so old as when his first great affection had been cruelly blighted by the death of his father. He was aware that there had been silently growing up within him a new affection ; at first a friendship, but now something more ; a something that appeared to be the centre of every thought, of every wish for his earthly future. How it was he knew not ; he could not reason upon it. He had been afraid to allow his feelings to prompt him to action ; but to-day, most unexpectedly, his oldest friend, the one on whose judgment he most relied, had urged upon him the very course it would be the desire of his heart to follow.

During the last two or three years his intimacy with Cecily had greatly ripened, and with this increased intimacy had only come increased admiration. Precious as he felt she had become to him, it had never occurred to him until this day that it would be anything but an act of selfishness to ask her to share his life ; now, he saw only too plainly how helpful his protection might be to her. He was so accustomed to face peril of all sorts, that the present emergency seemed nothing surprising ; and once in a foreign land, he had friends among the continental reformers who would open their homes to his wife with alacrity, until such time as the storm of persecution had passed over England. But what were her feelings towards himself ? To these he had no clue. He, in common with others, had received a large share of her gentle sympathy ; but this she gave so liberally to all who needed it, that it made it

the harder to discern whether together with this sympathy there was any warmer feeling than friendship which it would be in his power to awaken and claim for his own. As he revolved these matters in his heart, time was stealing on, and he was startled by hearing the chimes pealing ten o'clock. It was three hours since the squire had left him to seek the Holdworths, and he ought to have returned ere this.

Fearing Cecily would be anxious, he went back to the house ; and on asking for Lady Oldcastle, he was conducted by her to the room where she had been sitting with Cecily. As he entered, Cecily started up nervously, for she had not before been aware of his disguise.

"Do you not know me?" he said, smiling.

The voice at once reassured Cecily, and she said, "I could not have believed that a change of dress would have changed your appearance so much."

He took the seat by her side which Evelyn had been lately occupying, and he said,—

"It is not the first time you have not known me in disguise! Many years ago, I will not say how many, but near the time from which I may say for myself that our friendship dates, you gave me this:" and unfastening a chain which he always wore round his neck, he showed Cecily a golden reliquary which had once been hers. She started and said,—

"Were you then that gray friar that met me in the avenue at St. Edel's the summer after I came there?"

"Yes. I was then flying from the same man who is now waiting to lay hands on you, thinking a prison and torture the most convincing arguments he can use for his faith."

"I have thought since," said she, "that some such reason might have made you leave St. Edel's so secretly, but at the

time I did think it a little unkind of you to go away without one word of farewell ; although I then thought so differently from you about religion, I had somehow hoped we were friends."

"You did really hope that even then !" said Theodore. "If I had known that, how many happy thoughts it would have given me in my lonely hours."

"Yes, indeed," said Cecily ; "you were such to me, and have been ever since." After a pause she continued :—"I do not quite understand the squire's plan, but I conclude that if the Holdworths take me with them to the coast, I shall see the last of every one here very soon, and then will begin a new life for me with strangers. And you, what will become of you ? will you venture to remain in England ?"

"I have decided nothing, Cecily," he said ; "*you* shall decide what *I* do."

There was something in his troubled manner which startled Cecily ; it was hasty and agitated, as if he were speaking with a great effort.

She looked at him inquiringly, and said, "I ?"

"Yes," he continued, speaking rapidly. "*You* shall say whether you will give me the right to watch over you on your journey ; and whether, when you have found a resting-place beyond the seas, you will welcome me there ; and whether afterwards you will share my wanderings and my labours. Cecily, I have no home to offer you in the common acceptation of the word ; but could we not make a home wherever the providence of God shall call us ? Can love and trust suffice for you ?"

Cecily could find no words in which to answer him. She knew well that ever since she had known him a light and a gladness had entered her heart whenever he was present. She knew that the happiest moments of her life had been shared

with him, and that part of the pang in leaving St. Edel's consisted in breaking up the constant intercourse she had enjoyed with him during the last year or two ; and now he was asking her to be with him always ! She felt bewildered and overcome as these thoughts passed through her mind, and while she was thinking to herself, "Would not the happiness be too great for earth?" he, feeling hurt and distressed at meeting with no response, said, "It is perhaps selfish to trouble you at such a time, and if you think so, forget what I have said ; but now that we are perhaps on the eve of a long separation, I could not resist speaking to you of what was in my heart. It was, perhaps, too much to ask you to give me yourself. Forgive me if I have added to your trouble."

"No," she said gently ; "it is not that indeed. I have always thought I should be alone in the world. Such happiness would be too great for me ; I cannot understand it."

In a moment the cloud was lifted from Theodore's heart, and the doubts and perils of the moment were altogether forgotten.

"Cecily," he said, taking her hand, "I too thought I was destined to be a lonely being, with no one to care for me beyond all others ; and until I knew you I was resigned to my fate. Perhaps I might have continued silent now, and have missed the great blessing you are willing to bestow upon me, had it not been for a few words that fell yesterday from our dear old friend."

Cecily looked up inquiringly with her eyes full of tears.

"I cannot tell you all that he said," continued Theodore ; "but I had sometimes thought that he intended that you should be betrothed to one of his sons."

"Oh, never ! never !" broke in Cecily.

“So he seemed to clear the way for me to speak to you, and dispelled that fear.”

Then Theodore told of his past uncertainties and future hopes; and Cecily listened, doubting whether it was not all a dream, and wondering how, in the midst of the great sorrow of the present time, such a strange joy should take possession of her heart.

The hours passed, but they heeded them not, for a new life had begun for both of them, which threw far into the background the fears and sorrows of the past, and the dangers and anxieties of the future.

In the meantime the squire and Edmund had reached the lonely farm where the Holdworths had lived, but to their surprise and dismay they found it entirely deserted! An old shepherd and his wife were there in solitary possession; but they either were, or pretended to be, so deaf, that no information could be obtained from them as to what had become of the late inhabitants.

“There is nothing for it,” said Edmund, “but to pursue our voyage of discovery a little further;” and tying up their horses at the farm, they proceeded on foot along a track with which Edmund seemed well acquainted. Turning suddenly out of the path, Edmund proceeded slowly over the brow of a hill, and then wound his way amongst brakes and brambles partly down the hill-side. The way was toilsome, and on account of the darkness very difficult to find. At last Edmund stopped in front of a large projecting slab of rock, which jutted out of the bank. At the foot of the rock thorns and bushes were growing abundantly; but moving some of these aside, the squire saw Edmund apparently descend into the depths of the earth. He scrambled after him, when Edmund, striking a light, discovered

to his father a vaulted cavern in the hill-side. The entrance to this was so low that they were obliged to scramble in on their hands and knees, but once within the opening, there appeared to be both height and depth to the cavern; indeed, Edmund told his father that it probably was the entrance to some underground passage, which had formerly pierced the hill and led to some castle or monastery at a distance. At present they could only penetrate a short way under the hill, in consequence of the earth and stones which had fallen in from above. The secret of the cavern was only known to John Holdworthy, who had discovered it accidentally, and to Edmund and Theodore, to whom he had communicated it; and here he had concealed some of his property, and made it to a certain degree habitable, in case of religious troubles again breaking out.

"I had hoped we might have found them here," said Edmund; "but they have evidently gone."

"Look, here is something," said the squire, pointing to a scrap of paper affixed to the wall.

"Should you need us," the paper said, "we are to be heard of at Captain William Holdworthy's, St. Quentin's. We go there to finish preparations, and wait for time and tide."

"They are actually gone," said the squire. "What is to be done now?"

"Perhaps they may be delayed at St. Quentin's," said Edmund. "It is not more than thirty miles across to the south coast."

"The horses could not do it now without some rest," said the squire, "and it would be a long pull for Cecily; but I will go back and hear what she says."

"Sir Ralph may not be best pleased at such an influx of heretics," said Edmund. "I will therefore conduct you back

to your horse and return here. I can get everything that I need from the old shepherd, and Theodore can find me here if I am wanted."

The night was already far advanced when they reached the farmhouse, and mounting his horse the old squire rode slowly and sadly towards Pendower.

At the time that these events were taking place, Father Cyprian and his friend and ally, the Vicar-Designate of St. Edel's, Father Sebastian, were in deep consultation at the old Priory.

"The time is long," said Father Cyprian, "since our last tidings arrived; I am burning to know what proceedings our superior the cardinal will recommend."

"I thought our letters might have arrived yesterday," said Father Sebastian. "You say you can trust these English bishops, but I have a fear that they may fail us at the last pinch. It has ever been so with the secular clergy."

"It is true," said Father Cyprian, "that all the bishops save Fisher assented to the accursed doctrine of the king's supremacy in King Henry's days; and Bishop Gardiner, now High Chancellor, went as far as he could to deny the truth in King Edward's reign, yet withal could not save himself from prison; and my belief is, that even now, were it not for the zeal of the queen, he and the rest of the bishops would hold to their fiction of an English Church apart from Rome. But now he has gone too far to retreat, and he and Bishop Bonner will carry the rest of the clergy with them."

"And you think their zeal for Holy Church will lead to the extermination of heretics, and the restitution of the plunder taken from the Church?"

“I do. Every port is now closely watched, and these rebellious and stubborn people must yield in time. The queen’s heart is in the cause; and now that reconciliation with Rome has been effected, and the legate received, ignorance must in due time yield to knowledge, and weakness to strength. You heard what that self-sufficient fool Sir Ralph Oldcastle said only the other day; and there are hundreds like him. There is scarcely a nobleman or gentleman in the land who has not soiled his hands with the plunder of the Church, and the battle now is to keep what they have got. Poor foolish souls, they little think that when they come to die they cannot carry their ill-gotten gains with them; and then the Church will step in to help them out of purgatory, whilst they will gladly give up all they now grasp so closely to escape the pains of hell.”

“But I thought you had some plan for making this English churl give up his goods before his last hour should arrive,” said Father Sebastian.

“And so I have,” said Father Cyprian; “for he is worse than an infidel, and moreover I owe him a fall. He pretends, as you heard him say, to have found some mighty secret, by which he can prove the Pendower lands never to have rightfully come to the Church at all; and so he intends to play this card and avoid restitution. I also have in past times heard somewhat of the doings of this Abbess Agnes, and have no doubt that she was a profane and ungodly person, though I did not know there were proofs of her villany still existing. But it all comes to the same thing in the end. Should the heretic woman, Cecily Tremaine, be the lawful heir, and proof be produced of the same, we must be beforehand with the law and secure her person. There was a time when every thought and device of her soul were as clear as crystal in my sight. When once she

is within my grasp I will work upon her mind, as I can work when I am set to make a convert ; and she, in spite of the defiance I read in her countenance at the celebration of the mass, she, I say, shall humble herself before me ; and I, in regaining for her the inheritance of her father from this worldly fool, will cause her to devote it and herself to the Holy Church from which she has wandered."

"And what if she should be obstinate?"

"Then must follow the rack—the torture—or lonely confinement, which breaks a proud spirit sooner than anything."

"And if these fail?"

"Then, as a last resource, she must be carried before a bishop's court and condemned."

"And what then about the inheritance? Sir Ralph would triumph."

"The ungodly shall never triumph," said Father Cyprian. "His people hate him. And has he not consorted with heretics, and in his fancied security done deeds that have brought many a better man to the stake? But until our powers come, my hands are tied ; and my mind misgives me lest our plan should miscarry."

"How should it?" said Father Sebastian. "Although, doubtless, all heretics are looking well to their ways, none can tell who will be the first example ; and your people are on the watch."

"Yes," said Father Cyprian ; "although the faithful are diminished in the land, I believe I shall be kept well informed of the doings of the whole neighbourhood. The person most to be feared is the man Squire Vivian ; and yet I dare not touch him, for the people worship him as a sort of demi-god, and I must feel my way with him. If Cecily Tremaine were taken,

and his daughter and her husband cast down from their high estate, it might go far to abase his pride. And then—”

“Then shall the foundations of the one true Church be established in the blood of the ungodly,” said Father Sebastian. “But yet I would that our letters were come, that we might be up and doing.”

CHAPTER XXIV.

CECILY'S DECISION.

T was past midnight when the old squire, weary and dispirited, reached the Manor-house. Evelyn was on the watch for him, and had a comfortable supper and a good fire ready prepared for his welcome. Sir Ralph was also there, apparently anxious not to fail in all the duties of hospitality.

"Oh, my dear, dear old father, how tired you look!" said Evelyn, as she took from him his overcoat and riding-whip. "Come in and rest; we have everything prepared for you."

The squire threw himself back in a large arm-chair, saying—"There is not much rest for me yet awhile, so I must take what I can get. But where is Cecily?"

"Cecily has been for the last two hours in my morning-room deep in conversation with Father Arundel, or whatever he is to be called. I left them there together while I came to prepare your supper; and when I returned they were quite unconscious of my presence, and he was holding her hand. So, as I saw that I was not wanted, I came away to watch for you."

"What!" the squire exclaimed; "holding her hand, did you say?"

"Yes, certainly," said Evelyn; "I could not be mistaken.

You are not vexed, are you, father? You know that priests of the reformed faith are allowed to have wives."

"Vexed!" said the squire; "I am pleased from the bottom of my heart."

"And so am I," said Evelyn. "Theodore Arundel always seemed alone in the world, with no relations and no home; and so good that I do not grudge him Cecily. And as to Cecily,—well, I never liked the idea of her growing into an elderly spinster, and she always wished to devote herself to religion; so now, if she marries a religious person, she will be able to do so without becoming a nun."

"I tell you what," said the squire—"it lifts a weight from my mind; for I was coming here to consult your husband what could be done, for I found the Holdworthys were gone."

"Gone!" Sir Ralph exclaimed. "It is time that every one should be gone who has offended the ruling powers. I would answer for no one's liberty in another week."

"Nor I," said the squire. "But it will be all right if, indeed, Cecily has a protector. I was talking of it this very morning to both Edmund and Theodore. I wanted, for one thing, to bring your brother to a point, and leave the coast clear for Theodore, who, I all along thought, had a lurking fancy for her. But now we are all together, I wish you would call them, Evelyn, and let us hold a council of war, for the time presses."

But as Evelyn rose to fulfil her father's request, the door opened and Theodore entered, leading Cecily towards the squire.

"I am come to tell you," he said, "that Cecily has given me the most precious gift in the world—she has given me herself."

"Bless you, my children," said the squire heartily. And embracing Cecily fondly, he added—"You are the child of my

adoption, and seem to belong to me as if you were my own flesh and blood ; but I give you freely to a good man and true, who has also been as a son to me. Bless you, both of you, here and hereafter."

The turn that events had taken seemed to dispel the gloom that had hitherto hung over all the party, and the supper, of which they partook together, was even a cheerful meal. But when it was concluded, the squire said,—

"There is yet much to be considered. The night is advanced and our friends are gone, therefore Cecily cannot proceed on her journey at once ; so she had better secure what rest she can, whilst we make arrangements for to-morrow. She will trust her new protector to decide what is best, will she not ?"

Cecily protested against feeling fatigue or needing more rest than others ; but Evelyn silenced her, and drew her away to a room within her own, where she would escape the observation of the servants the following day.

As Evelyn lingered, feeling unable to tear herself away from her friend, she said : " One thing must make you very happy—you can never doubt that you will be able to reverence Theodore."

"Never !" Cecily replied emphatically.

"I remember," Evelyn continued, "when Sir Ralph wrote to ask my father for me, I hardly knew what answer to give ; but I never thought I should find it difficult to obey him."

"Poor child !" said Cecily, kissing her.

"I remember trying to think whether what I felt towards him was love ; and I thought it was. But I am not so sure now. Are you quite sure, Cecily, that you love Theodore ? Did you feel any doubt whether you did or not ?"

"It was all so sudden," Cecily replied, "there was no time for doubt. I only felt astonished that he should have chosen me; and I had been feeling so very, very sad. And now I think I must be very heartless not to be sadder, when I am going away from you all. But oh, Evelyn, you do not know what a difference this has made!"

Evelyn kissed her hurriedly, and wiped away some burning tears. "I hope you will be always happy," she said; "happier than I have been. I would not have said so if you had not been going away. You will never be ashamed of your husband, for he is a good man. With me it is different. But then I was very young when I was married, and I did not know Sir Ralph as you know Theodore. I thought so much of his good looks and courtly manners; it was a kind of blind feeling, chiefly of admiration without friendship. Perhaps there was a little vanity that he should have chosen me when he had seen so many beautiful and accomplished women. Yet, do not think he is not kind to me. It seems ungrateful to talk like this, for he gives me all I want. But some wives are more lonely than unmarried women, for they do not have the friendship of their husbands, and lose that of their other friends. Oh, Cecily, what shall I do without you?"

It was strange to Cecily to see Evelyn thus overcome, and difficult to her to suggest comfort; for she knew that her friend would not understand her were she to dwell upon that spiritual comfort in which of late she had found her own strength. She could only say—

"Pray that you may be brought to be of one mind, and then you will have the sympathy you seek."

But Evelyn shook her head sadly. "He does not care for it," she said; and wishing Cecily good-night, she returned

to the room where the squire and Theodore were still talking.

Sir Ralph Oldcastle had left them alone ; and Evelyn, sitting on the floor by her father, rested her head against his knee.

"I have been hearing Theodore's plans for the future," said the squire. "If only the immediate present could be tided over, they are feasible enough. He wishes to make his way to Geneva, and settle there at once with Cecily. He says he has friends there, and will have work. If the Holdworthys had not gone off so suddenly, all would have been well ; but now, supposing he were to take Cecily to St. Quentin's and find they had sailed, it would be rather awkward, for it might be some time before they could find another shipmaster ready to take them, and they might have to stay about a long time, with the risk of being stopped at last."

"I never thought of that," said Evelyn. "The whole thing has come upon me so suddenly that I feel in a sort of dream."

"The best thing, undoubtedly, would be," said the squire, "for them to be married before they leave us. It would make them more independent of the Holdworthys."

"Of course it would," said Evelyn. "Why should it not be ? They have loved each other for years without knowing it, and there is nothing for them to wait for."

"Do you think," asked Theodore, "that Cecily would consent to be so hurried ? I had only suggested our travelling with the Holdworthys to Hamburg—where they think of staying for the present—and marrying her from their house, and then proceeding to Geneva."

"It would be much better for you both to be married amongst your own old friends. You do not know what difficulties might intervene otherwise," said Evelyn.

"But in any case," said the squire, "the utmost haste must be made. There is just the chance, if they could get down to the coast at once, that they may catch the vessel before she sails. The truth is, they should start this very evening."

"I am not unacquainted with the road," said Theodore; "and if we give the horses rest until evening, we might leave this under cover of darkness, and be down at the coast by day-break. There is no fear there of being recognized. But what should we do with your horses?" he asked, addressing the squire.

"If you should reach St. Quentin's in time for the vessel, you might leave them in charge of the tavern-keeper, and say your master will send down for them in a day or two; otherwise, you may be glad to keep them to proceed further along the coast. You might possibly find a vessel bound for Hamburg, where already many exiles have found a refuge. In a few days I will send Dick on your track, and then we shall be able to judge by the news he brings whether you have sailed or not."

"So let it be," said Theodore. "I cannot find words to express all that is in my heart; but some day, should I live, I may prove my gratitude."

"There is one important point that is not yet decided," Evelyn remarked; "and that is, how Cecily goes—whether as your wife or not."

"I will speak to her in the morning," said Theodore, "and she shall decide. The advantages are many; and I see but one objection—that it might cause delay, and attract attention to our being here."

"The delay would be very slight; and you know we have a private entrance into the church. The ceremony might be

solemnized this very evening when the household have retired for the night."

"And the priest, and Sir Ralph, what would they say?" asked the squire.

"The priest need know nothing about it, as Edmund could officiate; and Sir Ralph could not have any possible objection."

"I do not know that," said the squire; "as the law stands at present, priests may not be married, and Sir Ralph may fear that he might bring himself into trouble by aiding in such a marriage."

"The same Church which has introduced this law," said Theodore, "does not recognize my orders, as being received through an excommunicated bishop. Being, therefore, in her eyes no other than a layman, I am not conscious of breaking any law either human or divine."

"Sir Ralph must judge for himself," said Evelyn; "perhaps he may take no part. Leave him to me; only, when you have decided, let me know."

Anxiously the consultation was renewed the following day. "Why should you hesitate?" Evelyn asked of her friend when Theodore had been with her, and was to return for her final answer. "Are you not his already? Why add to his cares by possible separation and delay?"

"Is it adding to his cares to delay?" Cecily replied. "I am already a suspected person, and my presence might greatly add to the difficulties which beset him. Once safely landed in a place of refuge, he might join me without danger; and now, if anything went wrong, I might be the cause of his death."

"O Cecily!" Evelyn pursued, "you are not doing him justice, you are not judging him by yourself. Would not you run any risk to save him? Why not believe that he would gladly do for

you what you would rejoice to do for him? Besides, you cannot go to St. Quentin's alone; and do you really think that he would leave you now?"

"I see it all," said Cecily; "and yet the perplexity is great. Let him decide. If he says it is best, it shall be so."

Evelyn, seeing her advantage, at once summoned Theodore, and flew to Sir Ralph, who, moody and discontented, was ranging from place to place like an unquiet spirit.

Her heart trembled lest his selfishness should intervene to hinder the project on which she had set her heart, and carefully and with a hesitating manner she unfolded the scheme.

"Then," said Sir Ralph, "I am to understand, that if I offer no obstruction to this marriage, Miss Tremaine will take the earliest opportunity of emigrating to Geneva, and there will remain with her husband."

"I do not know what you mean," Evelyn replied. "I do not see what difference it can make to you where they live. Of course, their object is to reach a place of safety and to remain there; but you seem to require some sort of compact. Is it not enough that they, for their own sakes, are not likely to run into danger?"

"Yes," said Sir Ralph; "that is a strong argument. Theodore Arundel is an out-and-out Gospeller, and the day is past when the nation will stand married priests. Let him cut his own throat, if he pleases. I shall not interfere, for good or for ill; and look you, Evelyn, if this business comes off, let me hear nothing about it. I am going off to hunt for a day or two, and when I come home I should not be sorry to find our house clear of our present guests. It will be well if they do not bring us into trouble."

Delighted at this measure of success, Evelyn left her husband;

and as she went he said to himself,—“Once out of the country and married to a heretic, Miss Tremaine may whistle for her estates. Meanwhile, I shall fight off all talk of restitution to the Church, and keep my own counsel. That wily priest might have pressed her claim, and then confiscated the whole, if it had not been for this move. It has just come at the right time.”

The same evening, as the chimes were sounding midnight, a few anxious faces were gathered in the chancel of Pendower Church. Two or three lights were burning dimly, making the living faces there present almost as pale and ghastly as the marble effigies which were lying around. There lay many generations of the Pendowers unconscious and oblivious, while the last of their line plighted her troth to Theodore Arundel. Edmund read the marriage-service as it had been ordered in the last Common Prayer-Book of King Edward the Sixth ; and as his voice sounded through the empty aisles, the echoes died away in mysterious whisperings, as if the spirits of Cecily's dead forefathers were present at her bridal. Then, when the marriage-service was over, those friends, so soon to part, and so little knowing when or where they should meet again, gathered around the table of the Lord, and together partook of the communion of his body and blood according to the rites of the Reformed Church.

Thus strengthened and refreshed, they then returned to the house by the nuns' way. There was no time to linger. Cecily already had on her riding-dress. A few necessities were placed in a knapsack by Evelyn's loving care, ready to be strapped in front of her saddle ; and then the summons came.

Edmund was there at the horses' heads. All that Cecily could remember afterwards, was a loving embrace from Evelyn,

a fervent "God bless you, my lass!" from the squire, and then a plunge forward in the darkness when her horse had its head.

Steadily they rode on through the night, chiefly over high table-land which was unenclosed and open, and over which Theodore led the way, being guided, like a skilful mariner, by the stars which were shining brightly in the clear frosty air.

Their progress was necessarily slow, as the ground was broken, and after the first few miles entirely strange to Cecily, and but imperfectly known to Theodore. At last, as the morning drew on, they found themselves riding through country lanes; and occasionally they passed through a village where the watch-dogs gave notice of their approach, while all the inhabitants were buried in sleep. In one of these villages, while it was yet dark, the people were stirring at a little inn, where they got some refreshment for themselves and their horses, and then rode on, having ascertained that they were not far from St. Quentin's.

Just as the day dawned, the road began to descend gradually towards the south. Farmhouses and orchards became more frequent, and they found at last that they were descending a wooded gully, while the voices of children, and farm-servants calling to their cattle, announced that they were near no inconsiderable village. A little further on, and a turn in the road brought them in full view of the open sea, now glittering in the first rays of the rising sun. A slight mist hung over the valley they were descending, and the little cove which ran inland between the rocky cliffs. A few fishing-boats were going out with the tide, their white sails glimmering like phantoms in the mist, whilst some larger vessels lay at anchor in the deeper water beyond.

Cecily reined in her horse, exclaiming, "How peaceful and beautiful !"

"Do you feel as if you could trust yourself to that boundless sea beyond ?" Theodore asked.

"Anywhere with you," she said ; "but it is now only too inviting and beautiful,—one quite forgets its angry and wilder moods."

They continued to descend by a winding road, on either side of which were fishermen's cottages, with large nets spread out to dry from the windows, or in the little gardens in front. Presently the church-bell sounded out from behind them. It was evident that it had been concealed from view by the trees and hedgerows among which they had passed.

"The bell for matins," said Cecily.

"Yes ; and look there," Theodore said, as a priest in the dress of a Romish ecclesiastic came out of a cottage on the right and began slowly to ascend the hill. "One might have thought that in such a retreat as this it would be possible to escape observation and enjoy freedom in religion. But it would not be so. And, therefore, I am sure it is best to take you for a time to a free country, where I can undertake work that will fit me for pursuing my own vocation whenever the way opens ; for, even if we could remain concealed in England, such concealment would oblige us to live for ourselves alone, and our existence would be useless and aimless, as well as subject to constant alarms."

A large tavern stood in the centre of the cove, close to the water's edge. There was a courtyard behind it, into which the travellers rode ; and Theodore having secured a room for Cecily, left her to rest, whilst he went in search of Captain Holdworthy.

CHAPTER XXV.

NOCTURNAL ALARMS.

T so happened that the farmer who had formerly inhabited the Priory was returning home from a distant fair, soon after midnight, at the very time that Cecily's marriage was being solemnized in Pendower Church. The village street passed close beneath the north wall of the church, only being separated from it by a low wall overgrown with ivy and creepers, and a little piece of the churchyard. As he rode slowly past, he was struck by the sound of a voice, as it seemed to him, within the church. As he passed the chancel end, he fancied he saw a dim light within. Surprised and startled, he reined up his horse, and wondered what it could be ; and curiosity so far prevailed, as to induce him to dismount and endeavour to get a nearer view of what was going on within. This he effected by leaving his horse tied to a tree, whilst he himself jumped over the wall, and, standing on a tombstone, looked in at one of the chancel windows. He thought he could distinguish a tall figure draped in white, and other dark mysterious beings standing around ; and when the voice ceased, he fancied it was taken up by other voices in the distance, whilst close at hand he seemed to hear a sob. Terrified in the extreme, he at once dropped over the wall, and rode home at full

speed ; telling his wife, when he arrived, that the spirits were abroad again, and that the church itself was certainly haunted. His wife, the next morning, told all her gossips of the supernatural occurrence ; and in two or three days the story, with many wonderful additions, was going the round of the village.

Father Cyprian, meanwhile, looked in vain for his letters, until the arrival of another messenger with still later news convinced him that the former ones must have been lost. The time had, however, arrived when action was not only possible, but necessary ; and he resolved to commence operations by sending a missive to Cecily Tremain, desiring her to resume her neglected duty of confession at a stated time. To this no answer was returned, and Cecily neither came nor made any sign ; although his messenger stated that he had seen Cecily with Dame Vivian at the time that he delivered it.

Remembering the cardinal's injunctions that persuasion and mild correction should first be tried before resorting to extreme measures with nonconforming heretics, and knowing it to be to the interest of the community of which he was superior that he should regain his former influence over Cecily's mind, by fair means if possible, he resolved to pay a domiciliary visit to Cecily at Vivian Hall.

Squire Vivian, who had returned home immediately after Cecily's departure, was prepared for some such visit ; and after the summons to her had been delivered, he took care to be on the spot until he could see what the next move of the priests would be. When, therefore, late one afternoon, just as the light was fading away, a tall figure in black garments approached the house, he was the person who opened the door and invited Father Cyprian to enter. But when he found that the monk would not do this, but desired to see Cecily Tremain, he

simply said that she was not within, having gone to Pendower nearly a week ago.

"And yet I heard that she was seen here within that time," said Father Cyprian angrily.

"By your leave, good father," said the squire with great politeness, "your informant must have been mistaken; for I myself took her to Pendower when last I visited my daughter, nor have I seen her since."

Father Cyprian growled an ungracious reply, but for the present could only retreat.

The following day he resolved to find out the truth of what he had been told, and going to Pendower in good time, he caught Sir Ralph in the stable looking after his hunters.

Upon making known his wish to see Miss Tremaine, Sir Ralph replied that she was not with his wife.

"But," said Father Cyprian, "your father-in-law distinctly assured me that he had left her here on a visit."

"I know nothing about her," said Sir Ralph; "all I can say is, that to my certain knowledge she is not here."

"When did you last see her?" inquired Father Cyprian, whose suspicions of foul play in some shape were now aroused.

"I have no recollection of the time," said Sir Ralph. "I have been absent from home for several days; she may have visited my wife during my absence, but she is not here now."

"You know more than you choose to say," said Father Cyprian. "Let me see Lady Oldcastle at once. It is of the utmost importance that I should now confer with Cecily Tremaine."

As he said this, Sir Ralph led the way into the house, followed closely by Father Cyprian. Leaving him for a moment in the ante-room, he went into Evelyn's morning-room, and

seeing the door of a large hanging-closet open, he motioned her in and shut it up. Then returning to Father Cyprian, he invited him in, saying, "My wife was here but a few minutes back ; she must have walked out."

"Ralph Oldcastle," said Father Cyprian, darting an angry glance at him, "if I should find that you have been tampering with heretics, it will be the worse for you."

"I tampering with heretics !" said Sir Ralph. "I would I might never see the face of one of them again."

From the Manor House Father Cyprian betook himself to the priest, Father Boniface, who lived in the village ; and before he had time to open any communication about the special object of his visit, the old man began to relate to him the story of the haunted church.

Father Cyprian listened intently ; then he requested Father Boniface to arrange that all the faithful, including the servants of Sir Ralph's establishment, should come to make their confession on a stated day, and that he would, for reasons of his own, hear their confessions.

It was not difficult for him to extract from the grooms and stable-boys enough to show that Cecily, in some disguise, had been there on a certain night, and that she had ridden away on one of the squire's horses, accompanied by one gentleman only. From one of the house-maidens he also discovered that a stranger lady had come and gone in the dead of night ; and that before she went there were noises as of people going and coming ; and that the maid had been awakened after midnight by the withdrawing of a rusty bolt, and she then heard the creaking of a heavy door. Father Cyprian's questions further elicited the fact that these noises and Cecily's departure took place on the night that the church was visited by ghosts. What

could they have been doing there ; and where had she gone ; and why ; and by whom accompanied ? These were questions that still remained for his solution, and he resolved that he would lose no time in endeavouring to solve them.

He first visited the farmer who had looked in at the church ; and from his account he could feel no doubt that they had held some sort of religious service in the church, and that two of the figures were Cecily herself and Lady Oldcastle. No doubt Cecily's flight had taken place in connection with that of the Holdworthys, upon whom he had also had his eye, and whom he ascertained had left the neighbourhood at about the same time. But the point on which his curiosity was most aroused still remained obscure ; and that was, Who had been her companion in travel ?

He now threw aside the incognito it had pleased him to observe until the reconciliation with Rome was effected, and went about openly and with great zeal to stir up the religious sympathies of the people ; in doing which he picked up much information that he considered might be useful to him—one thing being that Edmund Vivian was still occasionally seen in the neighbourhood, while it was confidently believed that Theodore Arundel had left it. He then still further questioned Sir Ralph's servants as to the appearance of the strangers who had come and gone so silently ; and finally came to the conclusion that it could have been with no other person that Cecily had taken her departure. On the first discovery of her absence, he had given notice to the authorities at the various ports on the south coast, that sundry contumacious persons were seeking to evade the queen's gracious commands for the reclaiming of her subjects ; and adding a full description of Cecily and Lucy Holdworthy, requested that every vessel might be carefully

searched before putting to sea, and notice sent to himself of their discovery. Having thus provided against their escape beyond the sea, and having set other machinery on foot to track their flight, he took counsel with Father Sebastian concerning another matter which he had on his mind ; and that was the apprehension of Sir Ralph Oldcastle.

"He is an infidel," said Father Cyprian. "If he were a heretic, he would have some faith to lose ; but I believe he never had any."

"Still," Father Sebastian replied, "the Church considers the case of heretics as being worse than that of infidels, inasmuch as it is easier to learn the right when knowing nothing, than to unlearn the wrong ; and therefore the remedies are more stringent and searching for such offenders as both believe and spread false doctrine."

"Nevertheless," continued Father Cyprian, "I am of opinion that six months spent in prison would bring down the haughty spirit of this man ; and if he were acquitted eventually, it might be through our intercession when he is properly humbled."

"Yet," said Father Sebastian, "sinner as he is, I do not see on what charge you would seek his committal."

"I am convinced," Father Cyprian replied, "that he has been in some way concerned in the departure of Cecily Tremaine. Am I not used to read the countenances of men, even as though they were open books ? Did I not see that in his eye, when I charged him with knowledge of her whereabouts, that told me, as plainly as words could have told, that there was something that he wished to conceal ? Even now, did it suit his purpose, he could tell me where to lay my finger upon her ; but that he will not, except under compulsion, I am well assured."

The information that Father Cyprian was in search of came to him, eventually, by very simple means. The day following his conversation with Father Sebastian, he proposed to Father Boniface to examine the church, in order to secure it from desecration by midnight meetings being held by heretics within its shelter.

On examination, he found that the door communicating with the nuns' way was bolted within the passage, so that no one could enter the Manor House from the church, while access was perfectly easy from the house to the church.

He observed, also, that several large cobwebs had been recently displaced within the recess where the door opened; and that the dust upon the stone-steps leading from the recess to the church had been displaced, as if persons had passed that way in some sweeping garment.

He inquired of Father Boniface what had been done with the English Bible and Common Prayer Book which had been in use in the church during the last year of Edward the Sixth's reign. Father Boniface pointed to a large oaken chest where the registers were usually kept. "There," he said, "is where I have put all useless lumber." Father Cyprian opened the chest, which had no keys; and there, amongst all sorts of mildewed papers, lay the new Bible and the two copies of King Edward's Prayer Book,—both that which was first in use, and the revised edition.

Father Cyprian tossed them impatiently aside, and just beneath them he saw the parish register. Thinking it was kept in a very insecure place, he took it up, and in doing so opened it at the last entry. To his surprise and indignation, what should he read there but the names of Cecily Tremain and Theodore Arundel, as having been married on the 24th of

January ! The name of the officiating minister was also there, and proved to be none other than Edmund Vivian ; while Squire Richard Hugh Vivian and Evelyn Oldcastle were the witnesses.

“What !” he exclaimed, grinding his teeth with rage, “do they call this a marriage ? It is no marriage at all. That fool Edmund Vivian is no better than a play-actor, and has no power to administer the sacraments of the Church ; and all they have done for Cecily Tremaine between them is to give her up body and soul to heresy. Shall they not rue the day ? And, to begin with, Ralph Oldcastle shall suffer. It was from his house this jugglery took place, doubtless with his knowledge and contrivance, and he shall answer for it.”

In the first outburst of fiery zeal with which the Marian persecution commenced, the persecutors, buoyed with a hope that the reign of the queen would be strengthened by the birth of an heir, who would be educated in the Papal interests, ventured on higher game than later on, when these hopes had ceased, and when, with the cruelty of cowardice, they only struck at those whom they were assured would be unable to strike in return. Father Cyprian, therefore, had no difficulty in obtaining an order for the committal of Sir Ralph Oldcastle on a charge of aiding and abetting the escape of two notorious heretics, and of practising heresy and sacrilege himself to a treasonable extent.

Armed with the powers of the law, Father Cyprian made a rapid swoop ; and in spite of his protestations of innocence, and denunciations against false knaves and heretics, before another week was over Sir Ralph Oldcastle found himself lodged in a dungeon in Cardiff Castle, there to await his trial. All prisons were at this time overcrowded with suspected persons, and these were chiefly from a class of people whom Sir Ralph had

been in the habit of despising. The company in which he found himself was therefore little to his mind, and almost more galling than solitary confinement would have been to his proud spirit ; but of this Father Cyprian took little heed, and purposely contrived that his trial should be delayed month after month, considering there was at any rate one less at large in the world to defeat his schemes.

It was with a feeling of awe and terror that Evelyn saw her husband carried off by the emissaries of the Church. When the officer on duty first informed Sir Ralph of his mission, he endeavoured to laugh off the accusation, saying it was impossible they could find any just cause for imprisonment against so good a subject and so zealous a Catholic as he was ; and he assured his wife that he should only make a short journey to Exeter, and then return. He also took a servant with him, to send word to her how it fared with him. But when the servant returned, bringing word that the bishop's prison at Exeter was over-full, and that Sir Ralph was remanded to Cardiff, then Evelyn knew that retribution in some form must be at hand ; and sending back the servant with a few necessities for Sir Ralph, she resolved to put the management of Pendower into the hands of her steward, to dismiss her establishment, and to seek the protection of her father's roof.

Before finally leaving the home of her married life, she carefully concealed about her person the seal, with the fragment of the old will, that she had rescued from the flames, the Abbess Agnes's confession, and the deed of gift by which her husband's estates had been made over to him by King Henry. She had the day before sent a messenger to her father and mother to prepare them for her arrival, but had particularly charged the servant to say nothing about Sir Ralph.

It was with some surprise that her father and mother saw her arrive with only one attendant, and beheld her tearful countenance as she embraced them.

"It is all over," she said. "Will you take your Evelyn back again?"

Dame Vivian looked aghast, and asked, "What is all over? Surely Sir Ralph—"

"He is alive, mother," she replied; "but they have taken him and thrown him into prison, and we know well enough what that means. He will never come out."

"Nonsense, child," said her father. "Sir Ralph has conformed to the queen's religion, and has ever been a loyal subject. They surely can have no charge to bring against him?"

"There is a charge," she replied, "of aiding and abetting heresy; connected, I suppose, with Cecily's marriage and escape. But oh, father, it is not that which has brought this trouble upon us! It is the land! No doubt the monks covet it. Oh, if he would but have given it up when first we discovered that it could not be rightly ours, this would not have happened. I have never had a light heart or an easy conscience since we discovered Sir Richard Pendower's will. That property has brought nothing but misery to all its possessors from the time of his death. Could not something be done to give it back to Cecily?"

The squire passed his hand over his brow, as if in thought; then he said,—

"We do not yet know where Cecily may be. No move can be made in this matter till we are assured that she is in a place of safety. It would endanger both herself and Theodore, even beyond their present insecurity, should the Papists know how much might be gained by her destruction. And then your

husband would certainly have a claim upon the queen for compensation were he to give up Pendower; and the present would be a bad time to bring forward such a claim, when he is in the hands of his enemies."

"Will he ever be liberated?" asked Evelyn. "I thought those who entered such prisons never came out any more."

"Sir Ralph is not a prisoner for conscience' sake," said the squire; "and it would therefore be a hard matter, even in these times, for his enemies to compass his death on the accusation you say is laid to his charge. Wait in hope, my child; perhaps your husband may be restored to you a wiser and a better man."

Then Evelyn brought out the precious documents she had carried away from Pendower, and gave them to her father, telling him the history of their discovery. "Take them," she said; "the charge of them is too great for me. I feel more of a widow than a wife. Do what is right and best about them. We shall never prosper as long as we keep them. Only let me stay with you during the time of my widowhood, and be your child again."

The squire received the papers, and carefully locked them in an iron chest; while Dame Vivian took her daughter to a room she had caused to be prepared for her, which had been hers in her girlhood.

"I am glad you are come, my child," she said, "even though trouble has brought you. The house has not been the same since Cecily went. I have never seen your father so low-spirited. And Edmund is gone, no one knows where. He thinks, as he has no wife or children, he may be able to help those who have; and, either here or abroad, he is going to assist the poor persecuted folk."

"Do not mind it, mother," Evelyn replied; "it is better he

should be doing good to somebody rather than living for himself alone."

"Alas!" continued Dame Vivian, "but I fear for his life. Already, I hear, they have burned John Rogers and Bishop Hooper; and if the learning and the godly life of these men could not save them from the stake, who may hope to end his days quietly in his own bed? Our poor Tom died a soldier's death in the service of his country, and Hugh is fighting for the queen. I do not grudge my boys when duty calls them to expose their lives, but oh! this hunting up and down the country, and burning and torturing, is too hard to bear. And then Cecily, what is become of her? She may as easily be a widow as a wife! And now Sir Ralph gone too! But they will not dare to injure him!"

"Do not grieve like this, mother," said Evelyn. "It may be for the best that we should all have these troubles; and when the time comes for them to go, we shall see it. I will try and be a better daughter to you than ever I have been before; and there is Dick at home helping my father. As the change came suddenly for the worse, so it may come for the better when we are not expecting it."

"God grant that it may!" said Dame Vivian. "And as to Dick, why, he is gone to the south coast to find out what he can about Cecily, and to bring back the horses if they are there. Your father would not send before, for fear of bringing suspicion upon any one, but now he thinks she must have got off somewhere or other."

"Oh! how I shall long for her first letter," said Evelyn.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE FUGITIVES.



DICK returned with the squire's horses from St. Quentin's the day after Evelyn had come to Vivian Hall. He had found them in charge of the tavern-keeper on the quay, an honest sort of man, who said they had been left there more than a fortnight ago by a foreign lady and gentleman, who had arrived early one morning and had gone away the same afternoon, and had asked him to take charge of the horses until they were sent for by the gentleman who owned them. But they did not seem very well acquainted with the English language, and could only say that when the horses were sent for he might know the right person had come if he wore a bunch of holly stuck in his hat. (The sign agreed upon between the squire and Theodore.) The lady and gentleman had said that they had met with some friends who were going to take them further west, and he had seen them riding out of the town before sunset the same afternoon.

This was the whole amount of the scanty information that Dick brought with him. Month after month passed, and still no tidings came of the fugitives; only Edmund, who was continually wandering amongst the families who remained faithful to the Reformed religion, occasionally came home for a night,

and brought the comforting news that they had not been taken, as he was so much in the way of hearing of every fresh trial and imprisonment that certainly the news could not have escaped him. Moreover, he was aware that Father Cyprian had not relaxed his vigilance, which also assured him that they had either found some safe place of concealment or had escaped over the sea.

Meanwhile the persecution raged fiercely at home. By the month of May fifty persons had been put to death, while the prisons were still crowded with fresh victims awaiting their trial. Men and women were equally the objects of inquisitorial torture; and the queen, with the legate and the bishops, still urged on the fanatical outrages.

At this time the little congregation who, under Theodore's teaching, had learned to appreciate the pure light which the Reformation brought with it, dwelt apart in silence and prayer; but the universal feeling against the cruelties that were being perpetrated in other parts of the country was so unanimous and so intense, that Father Sebastian durst not proceed to any overt acts of violence, and urged Father Cyprian to rest content with making an example of that traitor and deceiver, Sir Ralph Oldcastle.

Sir Ralph therefore languished in prison, no communication being allowed him with the outside world, and no amenities to soften the rigour of his lot.

The October following was marked by the martyrdom of Ridley and Latimer; and only one month later Gardiner, Bishop of Winchester, died a natural death. But though he, who had caused the death of so many, was thus hindered from carrying on his evil work, there were plenty of others to take it up, and the persecution still continued.

In the midst of so much that was distressing and harrowing, the hearts of the squire and his family were at last gladdened by receiving a letter from Cecily. It was written as long ago as the preceding April, and it had passed through many hands, at last reaching Edmund by means of some foreign friends with whom he was in occasional communication. To their unspeakable relief, it was dated from Geneva ; and the happy tone that pervaded it passed through the whole household like a gleam of sunshine.

“I wish I could impart to you, my dearest friends,” the letter ran, “a portion of the joy and thankfulness that fill my heart as I sit writing to you from our little cottage, where we have indeed found a home after all our wanderings. Here we have the lake and the mountains, and Nature in her most beautiful aspect ; but, more than this, we have the freedom and security of which you at home have been so cruelly robbed, and a society of great and good men who have been driven away from England by the troubles of the times ; and, above all, we have one another. To you, who know us both so well, and to whom, under God, we are indebted for our present happiness, I can speak freely of this great, this precious gift. I could almost bless the day which uprooted me from my native soil, if it were not that, in giving me Theodore, it divided me from those who are so unspeakably dear to me. And now my thoughts go back to that woful night when I saw you all for the last time, and I seem to feel again the pang of that separation. And you too will wish to know how it fared with us when that parting was over. I shall never forget that ride in the starlight over the barren Cornish wilds. We seemed a lifetime riding on and on, seeing nothing distinctly, but yet not daring to relax our gaze, —a type of our circumstances, for truly we could not see our

next step forwards into life. In the dawn of the morning we reached St. Quentin's, and there we found a calm sea shining brightly in the sunlight, with little waves rippling in, one above another, in the quiet bay. But alas, our friends were gone! Theodore went in search of them, and came back to tell me they had sailed at sunset. Painful as the disappointment was, yet how great was the consolation to feel that we were together! Had I been alone, how could I have borne it! Then Theodore told me that there was yet one more hope, if I could bear another ten miles on horseback; for that at the house to which he had been directed, the wife of the captain who had taken our friends was evidently on the look-out for some one from our parts, and knew our password, and she had a message to say that a friend who owned a large fishing-smack in a neighbouring port would be sailing with the first fair wind for Antwerp, and that we might make terms with him to put us across. Our friend at St. Quentin's procured fresh horses for us, and another weary ride occupied the first part of the night; but at last we arrived at a little fishing-port, where there were several cottages with lights in the windows, as the men were preparing to go out with the tide. On inquiry, Theodore found that the owner of the smack he was in search of was on board his vessel, making preparations for sailing that night, the wind and tide both being favourable. Whilst he went to look for him I sat by the fire with his wife, a kindly old woman, with whom I conversed in the Cornish tongue, she being unable to speak English. The time seemed long that Theodore was away. At last he returned, and asked me to come and see the vessel, and decide whether I could venture out to sea in it. I found it to be of a good size for a fishing-boat, being evidently used for some small trading as well as fishing. There was a raised cabin on the

deck, where all the cooking was carried on; and a small sleeping compartment within, which was offered to me. The owner of the vessel was on board, with two men and a boy, and with this crew it was proposed to put to sea.

“‘Well,’ said Theodore, ‘what do you say? Shall we go in this, or wait for another opportunity?’

“‘What would you do if I were not here?’ I asked.

“‘I should go if I much wished it. The sea is calm at present, the mariners are experienced, and the vessel is staunch; only the weariness for you will be great.’

“‘If that is all, I will decide to go,’ I replied.

“Our preparations were soon made, and just before sunrise we weighed anchor.

“The outline of the coast we were leaving behind us reminded me of the rocky cliffs near Pendower. There were bare bold headlands, with masses of rock jutting out into the sea, and here and there a little cove or gully running up between them and lined with white cottages. There were more of these than there are near home, as there is more fishing; indeed, I should think all the men are fishermen in those parts. The wind shifted a little during the day, and we were obliged to tack, and the next morning we found ourselves off the coast of France. I had got a little sleep during the night, as I felt the way had been toilsome and I was weary; but the sea was getting rough as the wind rose, and though Theodore covered me with a large cloak and some sailcloth, I could not stay on the open deck, but was obliged to retreat into the stifling little cabin, both on account of the cold and because the waves began to wash over the vessel. By night it was blowing a gale, and all sail was taken in. Fortunately the wind was now behind us, so that we made way in spite of the bad weather; but many

times that night I thought that perhaps though we had escaped death by fire, we should meet it by water. All this time Theodore was helping the crew as if he had been a sailor himself; but he often found time to come to me and assure me that the storm was not really very severe—although his looks belied his words, for the snow which was now falling hung about his clothes, and he told me that the ropes were stiff with the frost. I felt ashamed of myself, to be lying there in safety and comparative warmth when they were enduring such hardships, but I was quite powerless, and could not have kept on my legs with such a cockle-shell as our vessel appeared rolling frightfully from side to side, and apparently on the point of being swallowed up by the advancing waves.

“With the morning the storm abated, but the wind still kept up all that day and night; yet the sun shone part of the time, and I was able to move about a little, and try to assist by boiling some water and preparing some hot porridge for dinner.

“The last day of our voyage was rather dark and misty, but towards evening we entered calmer water and began to see lights on the shore, and there were large vessels coming and going. It was so cold that I was obliged to keep within the cabin; but somewhere about midnight Theodore came to tell me that we were going to cast anchor, and he asked me to remain where I was while he went on shore to see where we could be taken in.

“A strange feeling of loneliness came over me whilst he was gone, and then indeed I realized what a forlorn creature I should have been without him. I sat by the cabin fire, with the old fisherman, and helped him to prepare supper, and talked to him in Cornish, which was more familiar to him than English.

“Theodore was gone about two hours, and when he returned

he said he had found some friends who would take us in, but that the sooner we could proceed on our journey the better it would be for us. So we took leave of our Cornish friends; and in leaving the little vessel that had been our ark of refuge, we cut the last remaining link with our own dear country.

“It was in the silence of night that we threaded our way through the gloomy streets of the first great city I ever was in. But Theodore seemed quite at home there, and led me on and on till we entered an archway by a little side-gate, which was unbarred by some one who was waiting there; and on Theodore giving the password, we walked over a paved court, and then he knocked at a large massive door, which was opened by a venerable man in a peculiar garb.

“He addressed me in Spanish, which he spoke with a foreign accent; and I found that he was the master of the house, a Protestant, and had been a friend of Theodore’s father. He introduced me to his wife and daughter, who also spoke a little Spanish. They were very kind to me; but I was so worn out that I could do little all the next day.

“Theodore never seemed to flag, and I really wondered how he could keep up as he did, after all he had gone through; but he looked so happy and cheerful that it gave me courage, and I felt able when evening came to proceed on our journey. He wished us to attract as little attention as possible till we were beyond the emperor’s dominions, and so we travelled night and day until we reached Frankfort. There we found a goodly company of English exiles, many of them friends of Theodore, so there we made our first resting-place.

“There had been so much speed and confusion ever since our troubles began, and so much hurrying from place to place, that I had lost account of time, and was surprised when Theo-

dore told me that the next day would be Sunday. I could scarcely believe that it was I who had lived to see another Sunday! Then he told me that the French Protestants were well disposed towards the Reformed people of the Church of England, and that they had arranged to lend them their church for an English service. So, would you believe it, there, in that foreign country, among strange faces, and people speaking a strange language, we had the prayers of King Edward's Book, the Bible in English, and a sermon from a venerable old clergyman, who, with a number of others, had taken refuge there at the beginning of Queen Mary's reign, when the married clergy were proscribed.

"How those familiar words went to my heart, and made me feel we could sing the Lord's song in a strange land!

"By the following Sunday we were at Zurich, where we found more friends; and again we had an English congregation and the English Prayer Book. At Zurich Theodore first had put before him a work which is likely to occupy him during many years of exile. It was not, however, until we arrived at Geneva that the idea was brought to maturity. For here we found the late Bishop of Exeter under King Edward, the learned Miles Coverdale, who, having known Theodore in early days as well as at Pendower, has invited him to assist in a work that is already begun, of revising the translation of the English Bible, dividing it into verses with numbers attached to them, thus making it more easy of reference. Here we have a goodly assembly of great and learned men, who are also assisting in this work, and they all of them believe that the undertaking in which they are now engaged will bring in a rich harvest to the cause of Truth whenever the dark cloud that is now hanging over England is removed. But even as I write fresh exiles

come in from the old country, bearing with them such news as wrings my heart with anguish, so many already have won the martyr's crown ; and how many more shall yet be delivered to the fury of the oppressor, God only knows ! Surely soon this sifting time must cease, that our unhappy Church and nation may once again enjoy the blessings of peace !

“ And now, my friends, Theodore has come to say that there is a way open to send this letter, and I must hastily send it forth on its venture. I know not whether it will ever reach the hands for which it is intended, so I give no names, but the hearts of all will tell them that I am true to them. Let them think of me as I think of them. I dare not say more, and the messenger waits.—Now, and for ever, your loving

“CECILY.”

CHAPTER XXVII.

FAREWELL.

“HAT are the church-bells ringing for so early?” asked Dame Vivian of the squire, one November morning, nearly four years after Cecily’s marriage.

“What!” said the squire, rubbing his eyes, and listening intently—“ringing! To be sure they are ringing. It can be but for one cause. The news must have come in the night. The Princess Elizabeth must now be queen! Great and glorious news the bells will bring us this Christmas-tide.”

“But they never tolled for the old queen!” said Dame Vivian.

“They never tolled for her four hundred slaughtered children,” replied the squire gruffly; “why should they toll for her? But I will go and see if indeed it is true.”

As he walked forth a queen’s messenger rode up at full speed, bearing a missive from Hugh, who was now in the Guards. It was indeed true. Queen Mary had breathed her last; and only a few hours later the Legate-Cardinal Pole had followed her beyond the grave. The Emperor Charles V. had preceded them by a few months; and thus were united in death a trio who in their lifetime had carried desolation to innumerable human hearts, and broken up the happiness of thousands of peaceful homes.

The squire walked forth through the village with the air of a man who had been suddenly relieved of a heavy burden; he threw his head up in the air, and whistled and called to his dogs as if he had been a boy again. As he approached the church he saw Father Sebastian flit through the churchyard.

“Ah, bird of ill omen! soon will you and all like unto you be made to give place unto better men than ye.”

Then the squire went to the ringers and gave them a bounty to drink the new queen's health; and then he walked home again, shaking hands with every one that he met, and saying, “God save Queen Elizabeth!” When he returned home, Dame Vivian, with Dick and Evelyn, were waiting breakfast for him.

Age and their many cares had told upon both the squire and Dame Vivian, who looked quite old people. Dick was with them, now his father's stay and right hand. And Evelyn? There was a change come over Evelyn. A sad and anxious expression had settled upon her once bright face, and she wore widow's weeds.

In the summer of the year that Queen Mary died, a sore pestilence had smitten the people, and had visited with great severity the crowded prisons, and the poorer people were stricken down with poverty and suffering. The prison where Sir Ralph was confined did not escape the scourge, and though his strong constitution battled with the disease for many days, in the end he was forced to succumb.

The account of his death was brought to Evelyn by Father Cyprian, who had been summoned to receive his last confession. Evelyn herself had never been allowed to see her husband from the time of his imprisonment, although he had been brought back to Exeter to the bishop's prison there; but inasmuch as

the bishops' prisons were even more comfortless than the queen's, Sir Ralph's fate was by no means improved by this exchange. His trial was invariably postponed by the arts of Father Cyprian, and thus he languished in prison until death gave him release.

Father Cyprian brought to Evelyn his ring, and a message to the effect that her husband died a good Catholic, and had received absolution at the hands of his confessor ; and his last injunctions to his wife were that she should see that justice was done to the Church in the matter of the Abbey lands.

Evelyn was much distressed at receiving this communication ; but her father, who was with her during the interview, told the monk he was much beholden to him for the tender care he had shown for the soul of Sir Ralph, but he should have been better pleased had he shown an equal solicitude for his body during the last three years. As concerning the land, there were others to whom justice was due before the Church, and he would make it his business to see that this was done.

Father Cyprian turned away for the last time with maledictions on his lips and hatred in his heart, but he was now powerless to smite. The queen's health was known to be failing, and the battle of the succession and of the Abbey lands had been successfully fought by the people of England. In a very few months the Protestant Princess Elizabeth would sit on her sister's throne, and the nation, rising from the reign of terror with which it had been oppressed, might be expected to exult in its freedom, and to use it in establishing a truer and a better Reformation than any that had gone before.

After Sir Ralph's death, Evelyn appeared to sink into a state of depression that was very trying to those around her. She had always thought that his liberation would be only a question of time, and she had hoped that with his liberation would come

a greater unity of feeling than had ever existed between them before.

"If he had only lived to right Cecily himself, I should have been quite content," was her cry. "It seems so sad to have to do it by myself." And sometimes she would say,—“If I had not been so thoughtless and foolish myself, I might have had more influence with him.”

And then her mother would comfort her, and would say,—“My child, you took one another for better for worse; and he loved you as you were, and none but you.”

And then Evelyn would weep, and say,—“If we had lived in better times, he might have been a better man and I a better woman.” And still she wept, and it was hard to comfort her.

One day, however, when the steward was coming from Pendower to bring his accounts and receive her orders, she came to her father's side, and said,—

“Oh, father, when can this curse be removed?”

The squire looked at her anxiously, and said, “What curse, my child?”

“The curse of the land, father. I bore with it whilst I thought my husband might live to do the right, but now I can bear it no longer. Pendower is not mine. Take it, and do the best you can with it for Cecily.”

And the squire replied,—“I will hold it in trust until the country is free, then Cecily can claim her own.

And that night, by Evelyn's request, her father drew up for her a deed, by which she made over to Cecily and her heirs any right she might have acquired by her marriage-settlement upon the lands and domains that had been Sir Walter Pendower's.

“But there are still the Abbey lands of St. Wennon's,” said her father.

"Let them go to provide a stipend for the vicars of St. Edel's," said Evelyn. "The monks robbed the working priest to enrich themselves. In the days when there will be no more monks, the parish clergy must have the means of living without working for their support by farming or trading; and I shall want no more than you can give me, father—a home with you."

"So let it be," said the squire. "It is just and right. We must only wait until the blessed new times come,—and it seems to me the day will not be long."

Therefore it was that, when the bells rang for the accession of Queen Elizabeth, Evelyn felt that the burden of many years was to be lifted from her; and she urged her father to write with dispatch, and hasten the return of the exiles.

Earnestly as this event was desired by themselves, as well as by the household at St. Edel's, some months passed before it actually took place; for Theodore was deeply engaged in the work he had taken in hand, and he was unwilling to leave it until he could see the completion. Moreover, after all the changes and vicissitudes the English Church had gone through during the last few years, Theodore was unwilling to leave his labours of love in Geneva until he could feel assured that the Church which was to rise upon the ashes of the old one would be based upon a sure and solid foundation, with the Word of God for its mainstay.

When, in the following summer, the English Prayer Book was restored to the nation, and when, soon afterwards, Archbishop Parker was raised to the Primacy, his own Bishop Coverdale assisting in his consecration, Theodore joined the tide of refugees that was flowing back to the mother country to occupy the places that were left empty by the Roman Catholic clergy.

For him there was a vacant post waiting for his occupation.

Evelyn had never been able to make up her mind to return to Pendower, even for a visit, from the time she had left it ; and Father Boniface, with Father Cyprian and Father Sebastian, had retired to Spain as soon as the Act of Uniformity which reintroduced the English Prayer Book was published. The place was therefore for some months left uncared-for ; and there, evidently, in the midst of his wife's heritage, was a work laid out for him that was both arduous and full of interest. When, therefore, the way was made clear to his conscience to return to active pastoral work, he hesitated no longer ; and after the joyful news arrived that he and Cecily were coming, it was scarcely realized before they actually came.

It was with a chastened gladness that they met once more in that hospitable home that had been the scene of so many joys and sorrows. Some had advanced far down the valley of life, and some had passed beyond ; but yet to those who remained there was the happy consciousness that the years that were over had not been unfruitful ones, and that each for himself in that time of heart-searching and probation had drawn closer to the Fountain of all truth, and in so doing had found themselves unwittingly nearer to one another in unity of faith and hope.

The squire and Dame Vivian went down to their rest full of years, and soothed by the presence of their remaining children ; for Edmund after a time took up Theodore's work at St. Edel's, and became the vicar of the parish when the new order of things was fully established.

Evelyn and Dick lived with their parents. The former never recovered the bright spirits of her younger life ; but the return of Theodore and Cecily gave her the new impulse she needed after her husband's death, and created for her fresh interests, which greatly increased as years went on. And two bright boys

and a girl enlivened the old house at Pendower with their glad voices. To them she would often repeat, as they listened with awe-struck countenances, the tale of the Abbess Agnes, and their great-grandfather's will ; and then she would turn to the bright scenes of her own youth, when their mother and herself had been friends together in the old convent-days, when what was now the Parsonage House was once the Nunnery of Pendower.

